

**OFFICIAL HISTORY OF THE INDIAN ARMED FORCES
IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR
1939-45**

**HISTORY OF THE INDIAN AIR FORCE
1933-45**

General Editor
BISHESHWAR PRASAD, D.LITT.

**COMBINED INTER-SERVICES HISTORICAL SECTION
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HISTORY OF THE INDIAN AIR FORCE

1933-45

S.C. GUPTA, M.A.

Edited by

BISHESHWAR PRASAD, D.LITT.

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PREFACE

I have great pleasure in presenting this volume in the series "The Official History of the Indian Armed Forces in World War II", prepared by the Combined Inter-Services Historical Section, India and Pakistan. While the war was still going on, a small organisation attached to the Chief of the General Staff was set up for collecting and collating records relating to the activities of the Indian Armed Forces in the global conflict. This later developed into the War Department Historical Section. After the partition of India, the Section was reconstituted under a civilian historian in 1948 as a joint venture of the two countries and commissioned to write a detailed history of the part played by the armed forces of pre-partition India in the engagements and operations of that war. The history was designed to be an objective account of the military operations and organisational activities of the armed forces of India at the time. It is planned to publish this history in about twenty-four volumes including those on medical aspects of the War. The general history volumes describing the operations have been divided into three series : campaigns in the eastern theatre, campaigns in the western theatre and the activities relating to organisation and administration.

This volume describes the history of the Indian Air Force from its inception in 1933 to the close of the Second World War. Earlier chapters describe the formation of the squadrons, the organisation of Air Headquarters, the recruitment of IAF personnel and their training and education for the role they were called upon to play in the Second World War. Other chapters are devoted to the actual operations in which the IAF took part. Some of the chapters also give a balanced but brief picture of the Burma Campaign and air operations, and are thus a fitting supplement to our earlier publications on the campaigns in Burma. The IAF played a conspicuous role in the fighting on the Arakan coast. It distinguished itself in the defence of Imphal against the Japanese attack and later in driving them out of Burma. Here, it acted in co-operation with the Royal Air Force and the USAAF and the American Volunteer Group. In March 1945 in recognition of the part it had played in the war against Japan the title of "Royal" was conferred upon it. Thus from humble beginnings the IAF had expanded enormously during the war and could be said to have come of age at the end of it.

The volume was written by one of the narrators in the Combined Inter-Services Historical Section, Shri S.C. Gupta, to

whom I am grateful for his painstaking work. Squadron Leader N.B. Lal was attached to the Section for technical advice in the writing of this history. I greatly appreciate his co-operation. The account given is mainly based on the operational records of the IAF units and official despatches of the time. Published histories and accounts have also been useful in giving a coherent picture of the operations, but for the statement of facts and the views expressed in the book I am fully responsible.

The volume has been seen in the typescript by the Directorate of Intelligence and the Directorate of Operations, Air Headquarters, New Delhi, and General Headquarters, General Staff Branch (Historical Section), Pakistan. I acknowledge my thanks to these bodies. The volume was also seen by the late Air Marshal S. Mukerjee to whom I am grateful. I am also grateful to Air Chief Marshal Sir Richard Peirse, KCB, DSO, AFC, Air Chief Marshal Sir Keith Park, GCB, KBE, MC, DFC, DCL, Air Marshal Sir Thomas Elmhirst, KBE, CB, AFC, Air Marshal S.F. Vincent, CB, DFC, AFC, Air Vice-Marshal M. Thomas, CSI, CBE, DFC, AFC, Air Vice-Marshal D.F. Stevenson, CB, CBE, DSO, MC, Air Vice-Marshal A. Gray, CB, MC, Air Vice-Marshal Harjinder Singh, MBE, and many other senior officers for their valuable comments and suggestions which helped me considerably in improving the narrative. Finally I thank Shri P.N. Khera and Dr. K.N. Pandey for seeing the narrative through the press and Shri T.D. Sharma for preparing maps for it.

In conclusion, I thank the Ministries of Defence, India and Pakistan, for their ungrudging support and encouragement.

BISHESHWAR PRASAD

New Delhi,
March 1961.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AC	Aircraftsman
ACE(S)	Amenities, Comforts and Entertainments (for the Services)
ACSEA	Air Command South-East Asia
AFC	Air Force Cross
AFW	Air Force Welfare
AOA	Air Officer, Administration
AOC-in-C	Air Officer Commanding in Chief
A & SD Branch	Administration and Special Duties Branch
ATU	Advanced Training Unit
AVG	American Volunteer Group
AVM	Air Vice-Marshal
BAFSEA	Base Air Force South-East Asia
Bde	Brigade
BORs	British Other Ranks
CLO	Civil Liaison Organisation
Cpl	Corporal
DAJAG	Deputy Assistant Judge Advocate General
DCA	Director Civil Aviation
DFC	Distinguished Flying Cross
DGO	Director General of Observatories
Div	Division
DSO	Distinguished Service Order
EA	East Africa
EAC	Eastern Air Command
EFTS	Elementary Flying Training School
F/Lt.	Flight Lieutenant
F/O	Flying Officer
F/Sgt	Flight Sergeant
GD Branch	General Duties Branch
GDO	General Duty Officer
GDROs	General Duty Recruiting Officers
HQ	Headquarters
IAF	Indian Air Force
IAFVR	Indian Air Force Volunteer Reserve
IATC	Indian Air Training Corps
IORs	Indian Other Ranks
IT	Indian Troops
ITW	Initial Training Wing
JAG	Judge Advocate General
LAC	Leading Aircraftsman

MBE	Member (of the order) of the British Empire
MC	Military Cross
Mk	Mark
NCAC	Northern Combat Area Command
NCO	Non-Commissioned Officer
NTTO	Non-Technical Training Organisation
OTU	Operational Training Unit
PFO	Physical Fitness Officer
PO	Pilot Officer
PTI	Physical Training Instructor
RAF	Royal Air Force
RIAF	Royal Indian Air Force
RTC	Recruit Training Centre
SACSEA	Supreme Allied Commander—South-East Asia
SFTS	Service Flying Training School
S/Ldr	Squadron Leader
SOA	Staff Officer, Administration
SPSO	Senior Personnel Staff Officer
SSB	Service Selection Board
SWSO	Senior Welfare Staff Officer
TAF	Tactical Air Force
USAAC	United States Army Air Command
USAAF	United States Army Air Force
VCP	Visual Control Post
WA	West Africa
WAC(I)	Women's Auxiliary Corps (INDIA)
W/Cdr	Wing Commander
W.O.	Warrant Officer
W OP/AG	Wireless Operator Air Gunner

INTRODUCTION

The Great War of 1914-18 had for the first time in history revealed the value of air force as a weapon of war, and in the period preceding the Second World War aviation had made rapid progress, both as a means of transport in civil life and as an instrument of destruction in battle. Scientific research and mechanical advance were constantly employed in the service of aircraft construction to develop range of flight, speed and manoeuvrability, and fire power. Every major Power was unremittently busy in building up its air force to greater and greater strength which was made possible by the developing industry and the increasing expansion of civil aviation. The United Kingdom, which had made a beginning in 1912 with the Royal Flying Corps, created the Royal Air Force in 1918 whose expansion in the succeeding years was phenomenal. Germany, under the Nazi government, directed its major attention to the raising and expanding of the *Luftwaffe* which had developed into a mighty arm in a few years before 1939. The United States, the Soviet Union, France, Italy, Japan and even the smaller states of Europe had built up their air forces in the twenty years of peace with newer machines—bombers, fighters, reconnaissance planes, transport planes and varieties of other craft for particular purposes—of great speed, cruising capacity and hitting power. Thus a new element, completely absent in the planning of war before 1914, had been introduced in the reckoning for war by 1939, the effectiveness of which had been fully exhibited in the preliminary, though minor, fighting which acted as a prelude to the great international global conflict, the Second World War.

The Royal Air Force in the United Kingdom, on whom lay the burden of the defence of the widely spread British Empire, had only 78 squadrons at the end of 1936, and in addition the Fleet Air Arm of the Royal Navy had another 15 squadrons. This strength compared unfavourably with that of Germany whose first-line aeroplanes were estimated at 1,500 by Mr. Winston Churchill at that time. In fact, since 1935 when the German Government had declared its intention "to employ its air forces as a means of deterring disturbances of the peace," the British Government had awakened to the need of expanding its own air force. In May 1935, the target was 1,500 first-line aircraft to be attained by the spring of 1937. Expansion continued, and the target was raised soon after. There was improvement in the technique of manufacture and a change occurred from biplane to monoplane type. By the spring of 1939 output of aircraft had been speeded up, the new aircraft was replacing the old, the Royal Air Force was being re-equipped and new air

stations had cropped up. At the beginning of 1938, the strength of first-line aircraft was 2,031 and the number of squadrons rose to 169. In 1939 orders for the construction of aircraft were placed in Australia and the United States. Every endeavour was being made to make the Royal Air Force comparable in strength with the *Luftwaffe* and when the war actually broke out, the British air force had the co-operation and association of the air forces of the Dominions, which had also developed their arms considerably and whose manufacturing potential outpaced their local requirements.

In India, however, the position was different. The Royal Air Force had placed on itself the responsibility for providing such air support to the land forces as might be required in respect of the local fighting on the North-West Frontier, or in the event of a war with Afghanistan or Soviet Russia. The defence planning in the inter-war period had taken into account the employment of some of the squadrons of the Royal Air Force to meet any danger to the security of India from the north-west.

As early as 1918, India had two squadrons of the Royal Air Force, with a complement of 80 officers and 600 men. This swelled to eight squadrons in 1920, to be reduced to 6 only by 1923-24, as a result of economy drive during that period. Four of these were army co-operation squadrons, and two were bomber squadrons. The figure rose again to eight squadrons in 1933, equipped with rather obsolete types of aircraft. This strength did not increase, for in 1939 when the war began, the Royal Air Force did not have more than six squadrons in India, besides one squadron of Indian Air Force which had just then been brought to a three-flight strength. But the aircraft were not first-line operational aircraft and their equipment was out-moded, not having kept pace with the developments elsewhere. The role of the air force in India was a very limited one ; and as long as the task was limited to internal security or frontier tribal warfare, the strength and equipment of the squadrons stationed in India could not be otherwise. Primarily India's defence was part of the Imperial defence and therefore she depended for her security on the Royal Air Force in the United Kingdom, which could send the requisite force when necessary. No aircraft industry had been developed in this country and no steps were taken to train Indians to take to air in any large numbers. Civil aviation was also in its beginnings. Hence the Royal Air Force which continued to be the main air component of India's armed forces could not expand beyond a very limited strength before the war.

Demand for the admission of Indians in the air forces was made by the public opinion and the central legislature, soon after the war of 1914-18. The Skeen Committee had recommended that Indians should be eligible for employment as commissioned officers in the air arm of the army in India and that they should be afforded

training at the RAF College at Cranwell. But this concession was to be initially limited to two seats only, number to increase progressively. This was the extent of response to the demand for progressive Indianisation of armed forces in India voiced by the Legislative Assembly in 1921. The Committee had also suggested the creation of an Indian wing of the air force. The decision of the Government, as announced in March 1928, was to reserve every year six seats for Indians at the Cranwell College and to create an Indian Air Force which was brought into being by the Indian Air Force Act of 1932. The training of Indian air officers which had commenced earlier at Cranwell brought forth the first batch in 1933, when its first squadron was formed at Karachi. But it was little better than a token, for the new formation had five Indian flying officers and one in the stores branch, all under the command of a Royal Air Force officer. Only one flight, and that too in low strength, was formed. The second flight was added in 1936 and the third about the middle of 1938, but this last one had no aircraft on its strength. A reorganisation of the force occurred in July 1938 and the three flights shared equally the pilots and aircraft. Thus up to the date of the commencement of the Second World War, the national demand for an Indian air force had fructified in the formation of one squadron only, which was swaddled in the castaway garments of the Royal Air Force. The Indian squadron was trained for army co-operation work and had acquired its first experience of service in the north-west frontier.

The War introduced five Coast Defence Flights, manned by the Volunteer Reserve of the Indian Air Force. But even a few months after the war had started, the single squadron was neither complete nor equipped with modern aircraft. The Coast Defence Flights had been equipped with the discarded aircraft of the Royal Air Force in India when it was modernised. The shadows of war were lengthening and, it appears, Indian public opinion was growing apprehensive of the country's security because of its unpreparedness for defence in the event of the Royal Air Force getting involved in Europe or elsewhere. Sense of national prestige also contributed to the demand for the expansion of the Indian Air Force and in the Legislative Assembly debate on 8 February 1940 misgivings were expressed about its slow development. The Indian legislature recommended expansion of the air force commensurate with the size, population and requirements of the country. The Government of India, while cautious against rapid development owing to limitations of finance and time taken in training, decided to raise the second squadron as early as possible.

The increasing magnitude of war and the requirements of Indian defence called for fresh expansion in 1941. In October 1940, the first squadron was at full strength, but the Coast Defence Flights were only at half strength. The international situation

which was fast deteriorating in the east made it imperative that the air force in India should be strengthened. There was therefore a provision for the increase of the Royal Air Force units in India under the 1941 Plan, and there was also a proposal to raise the I.A.F. to a strength of ten squadrons, of which three were to be formed immediately. This was completed before February 1942. With the entry of Japan into war against the United Kingdom and the war coming to the eastern frontier of India, the need for further expansion became imperative. But it was not till the danger of invasion had abated and plans for the expulsion of Japanese from Burma and South-East Asia were being discussed that opportunity came for completing the target of ten squadrons. Between 1943 and 1944, the new squadrons were formed, an increasing number of officers and airmen was trained, more modern aircraft were made available, and the IAF attained the strength of nine squadrons. It was no longer an infant service performing army co-operation service only. It had built up a bomber force and undertook roles ranging from reconnaissance to bombing, combat fighting and pursuing the hostile planes.

The Indian Air Force, in the beginning, had seen service in the north-west frontier, but when the Japanese overran Burma and threatened the eastern frontier of India, this force was mainly involved in the operations in Burma. In the fighting on the Arakan coast it had a distinguished role. But the most outstanding part was played in the defence of Imphal, and later in pushing back the Japanese into Burma and then out of it. In these operations, it co-operated with the Royal and USAAF and the American Volunteer Group. For its services in Arakan, the Indian Air Force was given the title of "Royal"; and with this recognition it may be said to have attained maturity. After the Arakan operations the RIAF got Spitfires as well; and in this new role it had its full share in the campaign in Upper and Middle Burma.

The infant air force of India had thus not even cut its teeth when the war came. Its strength was merely symbolic and its role was one of internal security on the frontier. The commencement of war too did not immediately bring any fresh nourishment to it. It was only when India was faced with imminent danger on her eastern frontier, and there was no serious abatement in the pressure on the north-west frontier, that the British Government, under the influence of Indian public opinion, thought of expanding this force. The two years, 1942 to 1944, saw the force attain maturity and it will not be an exaggeration to say that when the war ended, the infant had grown into a sturdy youth who had proved his mettle by passing through the ordeal of fire. The experience acquired in the war had invested it with a sense of confidence and provided it with a leadership which helped to build it into greater strength subsequently.



CHAPTER I

FORMATION OF I.A.F. SQUADRONS

The Indian Air Force came into existence on 1 April 1933, although it had already been formally constituted by the Gazette of India notification of 10 October 1932. It was so largely as a result of the insistent public demand that Indians should be freely admitted to all arms of His Majesty's military, naval and air forces in India. Up to 1918 all King's Commissioned Officers of the Indian army were British. In that year Indians were declared eligible to receive the King's Commission. But this eligibility was confined to the infantry and cavalry only. The Montagu-Chelmsford Report on Indian constitutional reforms recommended that a considerable number of commissions should be given to Indians. Indian public opinion also demanded a far greater share of the commissioned ranks for Indians in all arms of the fighting services including the air force. A resolution was passed in the Legislative Assembly on 28 March 1921 embodying this demand which was further reiterated in 1923 and 1925. The Government of India thereupon constituted a committee in June 1925, known as the Indian Sandhurst Committee, otherwise known as the Skeen Committee after its chairman, Sir Andrew Skeen, Chief of the General Staff, "to examine the means of attracting the best qualified youths to a military career and of giving them a suitable military education."

The Skeen Committee in its report recommended, among other things, that Indians should be made eligible for employment as King's Commissioned Officers in the Air Arm of the Army in India and that for this purpose Indians should be admitted to the R.A.F. College at Cranwell. The refusal of commissions in the Air Force was, according to the Committee, singularly indefensible in view of the fact that a number of Indians were actually employed as officers in the Royal Flying Corps during the First World War. They had rendered efficient service. One of them¹ was awarded the D.F.C. and was with another officer killed in action. The Committee recommended that two vacancies should be allotted to the Indians at the R.A.F. College initially and that this number should be increased progressively.

The Government of India's decision on this part of the report was that an Indian Air Force should be created. Six Indians were to be selected by the Federal Public Service Commission to proceed to Cranwell where they would remain under training for a period of two years. This period of training would be followed by a further

1. An uncle of the late Air Marshal S. Mukerjee.

one of six months out of which three would be spent at the Army Co-operation Training School and the rest with various R.A.F. establishments. Emphasis was laid on Army Co-operation Training, since it was intended that the new Indian Squadrons would be army co-operation squadrons to start with.

The First World War had given a great impetus to aviation. India was also getting air-minded. The first flying club in India was formed in 1927 and by the end of 1930, six clubs were in active operation with the financial support of the Government, and pilots and engineers were being trained for commercial aviation. The selection of suitable recruits therefore presented no difficulty. The six recruits selected by the Federal Public Service Commission were H.C. Sircar, S. Mukerjee, A.B. Awan, Bhupendra Singh, Amarjeet Singh and T.N. Tandon. They proceeded to England in 1930 and of these the first five ultimately completed their training as pilots and the sixth as equipment officer. Unfortunately two of these, P/o Bhupendra Singh and P/o Amarjeet Singh, were killed in an aircrash late in 1933 at Padidan between Karachi and Quetta.

On 1 April 1933, No. 1 Squadron I.A.F. was formed at Drigh Road, Karachi, with F/Lt. (subsequently Air Vice-Marshal) C.A. Bouchier, D.F.C., as its first commanding officer. The new formation consisted of squadron headquarters and one flight of 4 Westland Wapiti aircraft. To put the new Air Force on its feet, officers and other ranks of the R.A.F. were loaned to the new service to hold key positions until such time as fully trained and qualified Indian personnel became available to take over these positions. During successive years further batches of recruits were sent to Cranwell and on completion of their training swelled the ranks of No. 1 Squadron. These included names which are well known in the Indian Air Force—A.M. Engineer, K.K. Majumdar, Narendra, Henry Rungaradan, Prithipal Singh, "Bulbul" Khan, Mehar Singh, Ravindra Singh, Goyal and others.

Exactly three years after the formation of the 'A' Flight, on 1 April 1936, 'B' Flight was formed at Drigh Road with one Westland Wapiti. F/O. P.N.J. Wilkins of the R.A.F. was appointed its Flight Commander. About the middle of June 1938, a third flight known as the 'C' Flight was added to the squadron. It was little more than a name as it was without any aircraft and had only one officer and a few other ranks seconded from 'B' Flight. The three flights of the squadron came together for the first time at Ambala in July 1938, and opportunity was taken to reorganise the squadron. The pilots and aircraft were distributed evenly among the three flights, each with an Indian officer in command. 'A' Flight was commanded by F/O A.M. Engineer, 'B' Flight by F/O S. Mukerjee and 'C' Flight by F/O K.K. Majumdar. Each flight had 3 aircraft.

Indian Air Force Volunteer Reserve. (I.A.F.V.R.)

The next stage in the expansion of the I.A.F. was the formation of the Coast Defence Flights in 1939 manned by the I.A.F. Volunteer Reserve. The proposal to form an Indian Air Force Reserve had for some time been under consideration. The Pownall Sub-Committee appointed in the spring of 1938 to go into the question of India's defence, in discussing various measures for coast defence while considering the maintenance of any regular air forces specifically for that purpose unnecessary, suggested that auxiliary air force units should be raised from the local flying clubs at the main defended ports for spotting and reconnaissance duties. The recommendation could not be given effect to for lack of funds. No money was available to purchase aeroplanes. The Expert Committee on the Defence of India (1938-39), otherwise known as the Chatfield Committee, sitting under the shadow of the gathering clouds of a major war, reiterated the recommendation of the Pownall Committee in their report submitted on 30 January 1939. In addition to the regular air forces recommended for the local defence of India, the committee proposed that five flights should be raised on a volunteer basis for certain duties in connection with coast defence. They were to be raised at Bombay, Karachi, Calcutta and Madras respectively where they would be developed out of the existing flying clubs. Bombay would raise a second flight for duty at Cochin. The establishment of these flights would ultimately be wholly voluntary, but to begin with a proportion of regular personnel would be essential. They would be equipped initially with Audax or Wapiti aircraft.

The procurement of the necessary aircraft was still a problem but the modernisation of the regular air forces in India, also recommended by the Chatfield Committee, provided the solution. Owing to the rearmament of the regular squadrons by H.M's Government, the aircraft hitherto used by them were available for equipping the coast defence flights.

The object of the reserve was to provide a force which, in time of peace, would be similar to the Indian Territorial Force, that is to say, it was designed to cater for civil personnel who were skilled either in aviation or in the technical maintenance of aircraft, and who would do their training in spare time and be called up periodically for intensive training. In time of war they would be embodied for actual service for the period of the war. As the enrolment of the reserves was made during war, they were meant for war service.

W/Cdr. Russell, who was entrusted with the task of raising the flights, personally visited Bombay, Calcutta, Madras and Karachi to choose the flight commanders, to whom he gave more or less a free hand in their choice of officers. His policy was that emphasis should be laid on the choice of young Indians with a sprinkling of young Englishmen. The personnel selected for the Indian Air

Force Volunteer Reserve was brought to Risalpur for training in coastal reconnaissance work. An R.A.F. squadron was converted into a training squadron for this purpose. An intensive course of flying and navigation was gone through. In October 1940, the course came to an end and the pilots and navigators flew to their respective ports. No. 1 Flight (Madras) was under the command of F/Lt. Donald Law, No. 2 (Bombay) under F/Lt. Gordon Lancaster, and No. 4 (Karachi) under F/Lt. Eric Sprawson. Stephen Kaye was chosen as the commander of No. 3 (Calcutta) Flight but he was recalled to business before the course was over and F/Lt. Hem Chaudhury took command of this flight. No. 5 Flight formed for duty at Cochin was at first stationed at Karachi as the airfield at Cochin was not ready. In October 1941 it moved to Cochin where it was commanded by F/Lt. W.W. Russell.

The coast defence flights were placed under a Coast Defence Wing under Wing Commander Dick Ubee with headquarters in Bombay. After Japan's entry into the war, the eastern coast of India became more vulnerable than ever and a sixth flight was formed at the end of March 1942 for duty at Vizagapatam. It had two Wapitis only.

Apart from the creation of the Indian Air Force Volunteer Reserve the Chatfield Committee did not recommend any expansion of the I.A.F. The Indian Air Force comprised a single squadron and even this was not complete. Though it had three flights, none of them had its full complement of aircraft and personnel. It was expected however that the squadron would be completely formed and manned by October 1940.

Indian opinion, however, looked upon this slow development with misgiving. It was apprehended that the R.A.F. on whom lay the main responsibility of air defence of India might be so engaged in Europe that any reinforcement from Britain for the defence of India in case of attack would not be possible. In such a contingency, India would be wholly unprepared for defence. Apart from this consideration, it was also strongly felt that India should have an air force manned by her own sons. These points were stressed by various speakers in the Legislative Assembly on 8 February 1940, in the course of a debate on a resolution moved by Sir Syed Raza Ali. The mover pleaded for a progressive increase in the number of Indian squadrons. The resolution recommended provision of suitable air training for the Indian youth and the establishment of an Indian Air Force commensurate with the size, population and requirements of the country. The Government spokesman (Mr. C.M.G. Ogilvie, Defence Secretary), while not opposing the resolution, pointed out that anything in the way of a vast expansion of the Indian Air Force would be absolutely beyond the powers of India to attain. The equipment of a single squadron cost Rs. 80 lakhs and its recurring

expenditure was from Rs. 20 to 25 lakhs. Another factor which was impeding the growth of the I.A.F. was the long time—about 4 years—it took to train air force mechanics who kept the aeroplanes in flying condition. In spite of these limiting factors the Government, he said, was doing whatever was possible. The foundation of the Indian National Air Force was well and truly laid by forming and training a squadron which “is fit and capable of taking its part side by side with the R.A.F. anywhere at any time.” The Indian Air Force Volunteer Reserve was formed and had become ready for duty. To provide air force mechanics a technical school was established at Ambala. Regarding flying personnel, various recourses were being adopted to ensure a reserve of well trained pilots in case of emergency. Indian pilots were sent abroad for training and flying clubs in India were training both beginners and members having flying experience. An R.A.F. squadron was engaged in training pilots and observers for I.A.F. The establishment of a large Flying Training School was, however, a very expensive proposition and was being deferred. As regards the formation of more I.A.F. squadrons the Defence Secretary informed the House that a second squadron would be formed as soon as possible.

In October 1940, No. 1 Squadron was at full strength and 5 Indian Air Force Volunteer Reserve Coast Defence Flights were in operation at half strength. In 1940, Plan ‘A’ put air requirements of India at 21 squadrons and 5 coast defence flights consisting of a total of 282 aircraft. The 1941 Plan took into consideration the deteriorating relations with Japan and further raised the air requirements. This plan as telegraphed to the Secretary of State on 12 March 1941 provided for 6 coast defence units (57 aircraft) 21 squadrons (325 aircraft) and 2 C.A.T.U.’s (12 aircraft). Against these requirements India had 5 Indian Air Force Volunteer Reserve coast defence flights, 2 R.A.F. squadrons and one I.A.F. squadron. The Defence Department proposed that, of this target, the I.A.F. was to provide ten squadrons. Three new squadrons were to be formed at various dates from April 1941 to January 1942. The five coast defence flights would each be expanded to squadron strength and an extra coast defence squadron was to be added. The I.A.F. personnel requirements would however be in excess of the personnel needed for the ten squadrons proposed, since Indians would be used as far as possible in the existing headquarters, maintenance and training units. It was also anticipated that certain non-operational units such as Anti-aircraft Co-operation flights, would eventually form part of the I.A.F.

In pursuance of the Defence Department programme, No. 2 Squadron was formed on 1 April 1941 at Peshawar under the command of F/Lt. A.B. Awan. Its establishment was fixed at 20 officers and 164 airmen. The squadron was equipped with Wapiti aircraft.

Besides the commanding officer, 6 other officers were seconded from No. 1 Squadron to form the nucleus of the new squadron. In May, 7 pilots were posted to the squadron from No. 1 Service Flying Training School, Ambala, and by June the squadron was up to strength. It was divided into 'A' and 'B' Flights, these being (respectively) placed under F/Lt. S.N. Goyal and F/Lt. M.K. Janjua on 18 July 1941. Six months later, on 1 October 1941, No. 3 Squadron was formed at Peshawar under S/Ldr. N.A.N. Bray, D.F.C. The squadron was equipped with Audax aircraft, 6 being received in October. Like No. 2 Squadron, No. 3 also started with a nucleus of pilots from No. 1 Squadron of whom 6 were posted to this squadron in October. During subsequent months the unit received allotments, both of personnel and aircraft, until by March 1942 it had nearly reached its establishment strength, though Non-Commissioned Officers, observers and air-gunners were below strength.

At Peshawar was also formed No. 4 Squadron on 1 February 1942. Acting F/Lt. H.U. Khan arrived to assume its command on 12 February. The squadron was equipped with Lysanders, the first allotment of 4 aircraft being received on 16 February. Some officers were drafted from No. 2 and No. 3 Squadrons. Besides, some pilots trained in England and having experience of operations in England and the Middle East also joined the squadron.

The I.A.F. had thus four squadrons. The proposal to build up six coast defence units to squadron strength was, however, not implemented. Instead, the existing flights were disbanded towards the end of 1942. According to Sir Richard Peirse, Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief India, the Indian navigators lacked the knowledge of advanced navigation necessary for efficient general reconnaissance work. It was, however, admitted that they had not been properly trained and equipped for it. The R.A.F. with improved equipment was now ready to take over their task. The personnel of the disbanded coast defence flights was absorbed in the three new squadrons, Nos. 6, 7 and 8 that were formed on 1 December 1942. No squadron was numbered 5 as there was an R.A.F. squadron with that number in India and the existence of two squadrons with the same number might, it was feared, result in confusion.

No. 6 Squadron was formed at Trichinopoly, Sq/Ldr. Mehar Singh, one of the earliest pilots trained at Cranwell being put in command. It absorbed the personnel of No. 1 (Madras) and No. 2 (Bombay) Coast Defence Flights. Besides, 10 pilots from No. 4 General Reconnaissance Squadron were included in the squadron. These together with 13 pilots from No. 1 and No. 2 Coast Defence Flights proceeded to 151 Operational Training Unit at Risalpur to undergo training on Hurricanes. The training lasted for a little over two months, from 14 December 1942 to 20 February 1943. The technical personnel also received their training, both theoretical

and practical, on the maintenance of the Hurricanes at Risalpur. In the meantime the squadron headquarters was being built up at Trichinopoly. After the training was over the pilots went to Allahabad and collected 15 Hurricanes and then moved to Bairagarh, Bhopal, their new headquarters. The technical personnel and the headquarters had already moved there and it was at Bhopal that the squadron came together for the first time in the first week of March 1943.

No. 7 Squadron was formed at Vizagapatam with the personnel of No. 3 (Calcutta) and No. 6 (Vizagapatam) Coast Defence Flights and I.A.F. personnel withdrawn from 353 Squadron RAF and No. 104 General Reconnaissance Squadron. S/Ldr. H.N. Chaudhury, a flight commander in No. 353 Squadron who had taken part in the First Burma Campaign as commander of No. 3 Coast Defence Flight, was appointed Commanding Officer of the squadron. While some officers remained at Vizagapatam to organise the administrative block, the pilots went to Peshawar for conversion to Vultee Vengeance aircraft at 152 Operational Training Unit. Training started in the middle of December and came to an end about the middle of February 1943. The technical personnel received their training at Drigh Road, Karachi. The squadron assembled at Phaphamau on 8 March 1943 and became a complete unit. Like No. 7 Squadron, No. 8 Squadron also was equipped with Vengeance aircraft. It was formed at Trichinopoly with the personnel of the disbanded No. 5 (Cochin) Coast Defence Flight as its nucleus. Though it was formed on the same day as No. 7 Squadron the conversion course for the pilots did not commence until 8 April 1943. The course at 152 Operational Training Unit at Peshawar was completed on 15 June 1943. In the meantime the technical personnel had their training on the Vengeance at 320 Maintenance Unit at Drigh Road and the whole squadron came together for the first time at Phaphamau on 25 June 1943. Here they were equipped with their aircraft. S/Ldr. N. Prasad, formerly of No. 1 Squadron and a veteran of the First Burma Campaign, became the Commanding Officer.

The formation of further squadrons was delayed by more than a year on account of the non-availability of pilots. This necessitated the inclusion of British officers not only in technical capacities but also for flying duties in the new squadrons. However, No. 9 Squadron started forming at Lahore on 3 January 1944, with S/Ldr. A.W. Ridler as the Commanding Officer, two Flight Commanders, one Engineering Officer, 12 British and 17 Indian Other Ranks. By 8 January 18 Hurricane II C aircraft were received. Eighteen pilots who had just completed a fighter course at No. 151 O.T.U. at Risalpur joined the squadron two days later. By 17 January the squadron moved to Bhopal. During February more British officers arrived on posting.

The next squadron, No. 10, the last to be formed during the war, was also formed at Lahore. It started forming on 20 February 1944 with S/Ldr. R.S.T. Doe, D.S.O., D.F.C. and Bar as Commanding Officer. The squadron was not provided with any aircraft until 14 March when 16 Hurricane II C's were received. There was further delay in bringing the establishment up to strength, the first Indian officer pilot arriving only on 23 March.

CHAPTER II

THE SQUADRONS

The present chapter is designed to give a brief account of the activities of the I.A.F. squadrons—their movements, training, exercises, etc., from their formation till August 1945. While a casual reference has been made to their operational activities, the detailed account will be found in separate chapters dealing with them.

Upon its formation in 1933, No. 1 Squadron remained in training at Drigh Road till 1936. Many army co-operation exercises were carried out. On 1 April 1936, the day when 'B' Flight was formed at Drigh Road, 'A' Flight moved to Peshawar. It was attached to No. 20 Squadron R.A.F. for training in frontier operations. Both the flights then underwent a period of intensive army co-operation training. Towards the middle of November 1936 'A' Flight went to Chaklala on attachment to No. 5 Squadron R.A.F. for army co-operation exercises. From here part of the flight went to Sialkot in the middle of December for four days to carry out artillery co-operation exercises with the Kashmir State Forces. The whole flight then moved back to Peshawar but on 12 February 1937 it was again on the move, this time to Drigh Road, for armament training. After completing the armament course, it again returned to Peshawar on 28 February. 'B' Flight, meanwhile, had gone to Bangalore about the middle of January 1937 for co-operation with the Southern Command. The exercises over, it returned to Drigh Road on 25 February.

In September 1937 the squadron had the first taste of operations. On the last day of August, 'A' Flight proceeded to Miranshah in North Waziristan for operations against the tribesmen. The pilots were on the job from 5 September to 21 October and again from 17 November to 22 November. On 22 November they moved to Peshawar. On 25 December 1937 F/O. S. Mukerjee was made the commander of 'A' Flight and remained in command till 27 February 1938 when F/Lt. C.H. Smith took over. F/O Mukerjee was posted to 'B' Flight as commander on 3 April.

The beginning of the year 1938 found both the flights of the squadron engaged in training. During the period January to April 1938, 'A' Flight at Hyderabad (Sind), and 'B' Flight at Bangalore took part in intensive army co-operation exercises. After the completion of the exercises 'A' Flight moved to Peshawar and 'B' Flight to Ambala. June saw the formation of a third flight of this squadron. At the end of the month it moved to Ambala and joined 'B' Flight there. Meanwhile 'A' Flight at Peshawar sent three aircraft to

Miranshah in the middle of June for operations. They were there only for a short while. 'A' Flight also then moved to Ambala on 3 July.

In September 'C' Flight was deputed to Miranshah for operations in Waziristan. It moved there on the 25th under the command of F/O K.K. Majumdar to relieve No. 20 squadron R.A.F. The flight carried out operations till its return to Ambala on 18 November 1938. During the early months of 1939, all the three flights were busy in training. Many army co-operation exercises were held at various places—Delhi, Bangalore, Drigh Road, Kapurthala, Poona, Lucknow—to the mutual benefit of the ground forces and the aircrew.

On 16 March 1939 S/Ldr C.H. Smith was posted to the United Kingdom and F/Lt. S. Mukherjee took his place, being the first Indian to be appointed commander of the squadron. At the end of March, 'A' Flight again moved to Miranshah for operations. Here for the first time Indian Non-Commissioned Officers took charge of their trades and successfully discharged their various duties. On 15 June 'A' Flight rejoined the other two flights at Ambala.

On 25 June 1939, the squadron started its conversion to Hart aircraft from the obsolete Wapitis. The conversion was completed in a few weeks' time and without any difficulty. After the conversion was over 'A' Flight under the command of F/Lt. Awan went to Drigh Road on 28 August as 'Q' Flight to carry out coastal defence duties. When the Second World War broke out, it was also charged with the task of defending the aircraft depot at Drigh Road.

During the following nine months of the war in Europe, the squadron carried out its duties on the coast and in the north-west frontier. While 'A' Flight remained at Drigh Road, 'C' Flight under the command of F/Lt. Majumdar, with only Indian personnel on its rolls, replaced the R.A.F. unit at Fort Sandeman on 11 June 1940 and thus became the first nationalised unit in the I.A.F. On 16 July, of the same year, 'B' Flight proceeded to Miranshah and took over this R.A.F. station from 28 Squadron R.A.F. with effect from the 21st. The flight remained there till 25 September.

On 1 April 1941, the ninth birthday of the Indian Air Force, No. 2 Squadron was formed and No. 1 Squadron parted with many of its most experienced officers and men to start it on its wings. In June, No. 1 Squadron under S/Ldr. Majumdar again went to Miranshah for operations. No. 2 Squadron accompanied them to gain experience of frontier operations by flying with the pilots of No. 1 Squadron. Operations in the Tochi Valley were carried out throughout June, July and August. On 27 July, No. 2 Squadron left and No. 1 Squadron remained in sole charge of the frontier air operations.

It was now time for the squadron to change its Hart aircraft for something better. These were obsolescent and were in use only

because more modern aircraft were in short supply, and the authorities were sceptic about the I.A.F.'s ability to manage more complicated machines. The personnel of this young force, however, suffered from no lack of confidence, and so when about the middle of 1941 some Lysanders were available it was decided to re-equip No. 1 Squadron with them. These were considered most suitable for army co-operation which was the main role of No. 1 Squadron. In August 1941 the Squadron, with entirely Indian personnel, went to Drigh Road for conversion to Lysanders. The changeover was quickly effected and the squadron flew to Peshawar in early September. On their flight back to Peshawar, one of the pilots damaged his aircraft while landing at Multan. It was feared that this accident, occurring so soon after the conversion to the Lysander aircraft, might give a handle to the critics of the I.A.F. The squadron's ground staff therefore worked through the whole night and by the next morning, the aircraft was able to continue the journey.

In October 1941 No. 3 Squadron was formed and once again No. 1 Squadron provided some officers and men for the new unit. On 7 November No. 1 Squadron was officially presented with twelve Lysanders bought by the people of Bombay at a ceremony performed by the Governor of Bombay at Peshawar. It was henceforward known as the 'adopted' squadron of Bombay.

No. 1 Squadron next went to Calcutta to take part in an exhibition. This was the squadron's first move together. It was a long trip but the squadron completed the journey without a mishap, thus belying the fears of the sceptics. As a matter of fact when the squadron returned to Peshawar, there were thirteen aircraft in place of the twelve with which it had started. On its way back, the squadron had salvaged one of the three aircraft of No. 28 Squadron which had crashed on their way to Calcutta on that occasion. About this time the Senior Indian Non-Commissioned Officer of the squadron designed a new wooden-cum-rubber tail-wheel for the Lysander. The tail of the Lysander swung viciously on landing, causing such a strain on tail-wheel tyres that these burst prematurely and as the supply of tyres could not meet the heavy demand all Lysander squadrons had remained grounded. The above tail-wheel, besides meeting the shortage, also eliminated the swing of the tail. The new tail-wheel was approved and the Lysander squadrons were once again airborne. These new wheels gave good service right through the First Burma Campaign.

On 7 December 1941, the Japanese delivered their attack on Pearl Harbour and followed it up with a general offensive in South-East Asia. Burma was in imminent danger of attack and all available forces were mobilised to meet it. No. 1 Squadron was immediately asked to be in readiness to move to Burma. Towards the end of December, the squadron started its move, reaching Toungoo on 1 February.

The squadron, including the technical staff under an Indian Warrant Officer, was manned entirely by Indians. It remained in operation till Rangoon fell on 7 March and for some time after that, the squadron commander, S/Ldr Majumdar, returning last of all to India on 12 March 1942.

After the withdrawal from Burma the squadron proceeded to Secunderabad and from there to Trichinopoly in May. In June, 14 pilots and 45 Non-Commissioned Officers proceeded to 151 Operational Training Unit at Risalpur for conversion to Hurricane aircraft. The conversion course over, the pilots went to Drigh Road in early September to collect aircraft. On 19 September they went back to Trichinopoly. By this time the squadron had an Indian Engineer Officer, F/O Harjinder Singh, the first to be commissioned in the Technical Branch on 3 September 1942.

In the first half of 1943 the squadron changed its location several times. In the middle of January the squadron moved to Bairagarh (Bhopal), from there to Chhara (Bihar) in the middle of February and thence to Risalpur in the middle of April. Early in May a detachment ('A' Flight) went to Miranshah for carrying on bombing trials. The Hurricanes were fitted with four $11\frac{1}{2}$ -lb. bombs under each wing and trials in dive bombing were carried out on the range with great success. While the detachment continued at Miranshah, the squadron moved again—this time to Kohat. During the next few months 'A' and 'B' Flights were alternately at Miranshah for operations. In October, the Headquarters Flight carried out an army co-operation exercise at Adampur. A ground defence course was gone through in the following month. In December 1943 Kohat Station with the responsibility for frontier operations was handed over to No. 2 Squadron and early in the new year the squadron set out for operations in the Manipur front, reaching Imphal on 3 February. It remained in operation for a record period of fourteen months and saw action through the fateful siege of Imphal, and the trans-Chindwin and the trans-Irrawaddy offensives. It withdrew from operations early in April 1945 and returned to Kohat about the middle of the month to resume its old job of frontier protection.

Coast Defence Flights

The coast defence flights which had been formed at the end of 1940 had a short career, being disbanded towards the close of 1942. Initially they were equipped with obsolete Wapitis with the exception of the Bombay Flight which had Gordon Rapides and Dominies. Later some four-engined airliners were taken over from civil air companies viz. some D.H. 86's from the Tata Airways and a few Atlantas from the National Airways. In March 1941, the Wapitis of the Calcutta and Madras Flights were taken away to equip No. 2 Squadron I.A.F. The flights were given Atlantas instead.

In December 1941, No. 3 Flight at Calcutta changed to another aircraft—the Blenheim I—on the eve of its move to Bassein in Burma for operations. The coast defence flights carried out their normal duties during the period of their existence but No. 4 and No. 3 Flights saw operations in Burma in addition. No. 4 Flight was in Burma from the end of December 1941 to the end of January 1942, and No. 3 from the end of January till the beginning of March 1942. In May, No. 3 Flight began converting to Hudsons which were more suitable for general reconnaissance work due to their longer range and better armament. The Flight, upon its conversion, was attached to No. 353 Squadron of the R.A.F. and remained a part of this squadron till it, with the other coast defence flights, was disbanded towards the close of 1942.

No. 2 Squadron which started with several experienced pilots of No. 1 Squadron in its ranks went for active operations within three months of its formation. In June 1941, a detachment of the squadron accompanied No. 1 Squadron to Miranshah for operations in the Tochi valley. The remainder of the squadron remained at Peshawar in training. The detachment returned from Miranshah on 27 July after completing its tour of temporary duty. The whole squadron then moved from Peshawar to Kohat on 8 September 1941 where extensive training was undertaken. At the end of September 1941; 'A' Flight relieved No. 1 Squadron at Miranshah. The squadron had in the meanwhile converted to Audax aircraft, their Wapitis being allotted to the coastal defence wing. On 1 December, 'A' Flight returned to Kohat from Miranshah, being relieved by No. 3 Squadron I.A.F.

In January the squadron carried out many army co-operation exercises. On 23 February the squadron moved to Secunderabad. After a short stay here it proceeded to Poona at the end of March. There it carried out exercises for testing the air-raid precautions in co-operation with the 50th Tank Brigade. Hardly were these exercises over when the squadron was ordered to move to Arkonam. The move was completed by 23 May.

In July the squadron took part in an exercise (Clive) which commenced on the 7th. The pilots flew many sorties helping the landing of a mock enemy party and taking offensive action against the defending forces. The sorties were fairly successful. During August no flying was carried out due to inclement weather and the month was spent in keeping the aircraft in good trim. On 9 September the squadron took part in another exercise (Jove) during which it flew thirty-six sorties carrying out low altitude and photographic reconnaissances, and maintaining radio communication with ground forces. In September it was decided that the squadron would convert to Hurricane aircraft. Accordingly, the first party left for Risalpur on 7 September. The rest of 1942 was spent in training on

this aircraft. The conversion course was completed by 1 December and the squadron was ordered to Ranchi to undergo training in advanced fighter tactics.

Until October 1942, S/Ldr. A.M. Engineer was in command of the squadron. On 26 October, he was posted away and S/Ldr. H.U. Khan took his place. In the first week of February 1943, the squadron proceeded to Bhopal to undergo a course of armament training. The course started on 15 February and came to an end by 16 March. The squadron then returned to Ranchi.

In April 1943, a detachment of the squadron, under F/Lt. Nazirullah went to Imphal for operations, returning on 25 May. On 3 June 1943, the squadron was transferred to Trichinopoly under the command of S/Ldr. Dunsford Wood, R.A.F., who had assumed charge after the death of S/Ldr. H.U. Khan in an accident at Hazaribagh Road on 22 April. While here, the squadron was on training for the whole period of its stay. Army Co-operation exercises were carried out at Kolar from 16 to 27 June and again at Kunmatur from 22 to 31 August. In September and October an intensive programme of day and night flying was carried out. On 19 October an instructor, F/Lt. Milne, R.A.F., arrived to coach the pilots in operational flying tactics. Air to air, air to ground, and tactical reconnaissance exercises were completed and a considerable improvement in performance was noticed.

In November the squadron moved to Kohat, the air party consisting of 9 aircraft leaving on the 21st and the ground party on the 22nd. Eight aircraft arrived at Kohat safely, the ninth, going off the course and eventually making a forced-landing at Malharnagar. The aircraft suffered minor damage. On 6 December 'A' Flight of the squadron went to Miranshah to relieve No. 1 Squadron. While 'A' Flight carried on operations in the frontier, 'B' Flight at Kohat went through a comprehensive training programme which included air navigation, cross-country flying, formation practice, dive-bombing and message dropping besides tactical and artillery reconnaissances.

On 1 March 1944, 'B' Flight relieved 'A' Flight to take its turn of frontier duties, and remained at Miranshah till 17 April when it was relieved by a detachment of No. 3 Squadron I.A.F. For the next three months the entire squadron remained at Kohat engaged in training. Some army co-operation exercises were carried out satisfactorily. From 12 to 25 May a detachment of the squadron flew in formation over the Indian Air Force Exhibition at Peshawar as part of the drive to popularize the Indian Air Force. Simultaneously, a ground defence course was completed during May. The object of the course was to train all personnel in defending an air-strip against hostile attacks. In July, inclement weather curtailed flying. Air Vice-Marshal Thomas, the Air Officer Commanding-in Chief, India, inspected Kohat station with the object of assessing

the squadron's fitness for an operational role. The squadron gave a satisfactory demonstration of tactical reconnaissance, close support, and aerial photography.

On 21 July, the squadron started its move to Kalyan, completing it on 5 August. A thorough inspection of all aircraft was undertaken on the squadron's arrival at Kalyan and flying remained suspended till 13 August. On 7 October 1944, orders were received for the squadron to move to Buraria for operations. The air party consisting of 13 officers left in two batches on 2 and 4 November, the first arriving at Cox's Bazar on the 10th and the second four days later. They eventually moved to Mambur airstrip on 23 November. The operational tour lasted till 17 May 1945. On 21 May the air party left Akyab, arriving at Kohat on the 27th. The ground party left on 13 June and arrived at Samungli on 1 July. Two days later the air party joined them. On 26 July the squadron received a visit from Air Chief Marshal Sir Keith Park who congratulated them on their successful tour. In August, under orders of the Headquarters, Base Air Force, South-East Asia, the squadron deputed three detachments for anti-malarial spraying at Wellingdon, Raipur and Jodhpur.

No. 3 Squadron

No. 3 Squadron remained at Peshawar where it had been formed on 1 October 1941, for about five months. In October, the squadron flew a total of only 71 hours including six hours of night flying. Shortage of equipment was responsible for this low total. The squadron, however, utilised its enforced inactivity by carrying out a course of ground defence training. On 28 November 'A' Flight went to Miranshah to take over the "Watch and Ward" duties from No. 2 Squadron. It carried on operations from here until relieved by No. 4 Squadron IAF on 1 May. The flight, however, returned twice during May for short terms from 8 to 10 May and again from 12 to 16 May. The squadron had meanwhile moved from Peshawar to Kohat on 20 February 1942. Towards the end of May a detachment of the squadron proceeded to Hyderabad (Sind) for operations against the Hurs. It returned to Kohat on 25 September, being relieved by 'A' Flight of No. 4 Squadron IAF. On 27 July, 'B' Flight moved from Kohat to Miranshah. It returned to Kohat on 16 August, proceeding again to Miranshah on 1 September to relieve No. 4 Squadron detachment. While operations were continued from Miranshah, the squadron at Kohat carried out training and army-co-operation exercises. From 2 to 11 November 1942, tactical exercises were held in co-operation with the 7th Indian Division under full war-time conditions. Normal squadron training also continued.

In the second week of September 1943, the squadron proceeded to 151 Operational Training Unit at Risalpur for conversion to

Hurricane aircraft, the move being completed on the 12th. The conversion course was designed to prepare the squadron for the role of a fighter-bomber squadron. The course was over on 19 November and the squadron became the first I.A.F. unit to become a fighter-bomber squadron. Apart from a few mishaps at the beginning resulting in damage to aircraft the conversion was executed satisfactorily. On 20 November, the squadron left for Phaphamau where it collected sixteen Hurricane IIC aircraft and then moved to Bairagarh on 26 November for training in air gunnery and bombing at No. 1 Air Gunnery School there. Training was completed on 9 January 1944. The next move was to Ranchi where a course of training in low-level attacks was started on 19 January and completed by 5 February.

From Ranchi the squadron went back to Kohat on 15 February. While busy in intensive training at Kohat, the squadron also carried out some operational tasks in the frontier. On 10 April 'A' Flight of the squadron moved to Miranshah to take over the "Watch and Ward" duties from 'B' Flight of No. 2 Squadron. Up to June 1944 the tribal area remained disturbed and the squadron had to answer many operational calls. From July onward there was very little hostile activity and accordingly the squadron's commitments were meagre. One flight of the squadron remained posted there till 23 September 1944, when 'B' Flight withdrew to Kohat after handing over charge to a detachment of No. 6 Squadron. The rest of the year was spent in training at Kohat. A few accidents are recorded during this period.

Early in January 1945, the squadron received orders to move to Burma for operations. The train party left on 6 January while the air party left on the 12th. An unfortunate accident smote the squadron on the eve of its operational tour. The Commanding Officer, S/Ldr. Prithipal Singh, who had been in command since 13 September 1943 when he had taken over from F/Lt. D.A.R. Nanda, failed to pull out of a dive while dogfighting near Kohat, crashed and was instantly killed. The aircraft was a total wreck. S/Ldr. Shivdev Singh took over command the same day and led the squadron to battle. The squadron arrived at Bawli North by 20 January. It remained in operation till the middle of April, leaving for St. Thomas Mount near Madras on 18 April, after completing its tour of duty. The squadron remained in Madras for five months carrying on training.

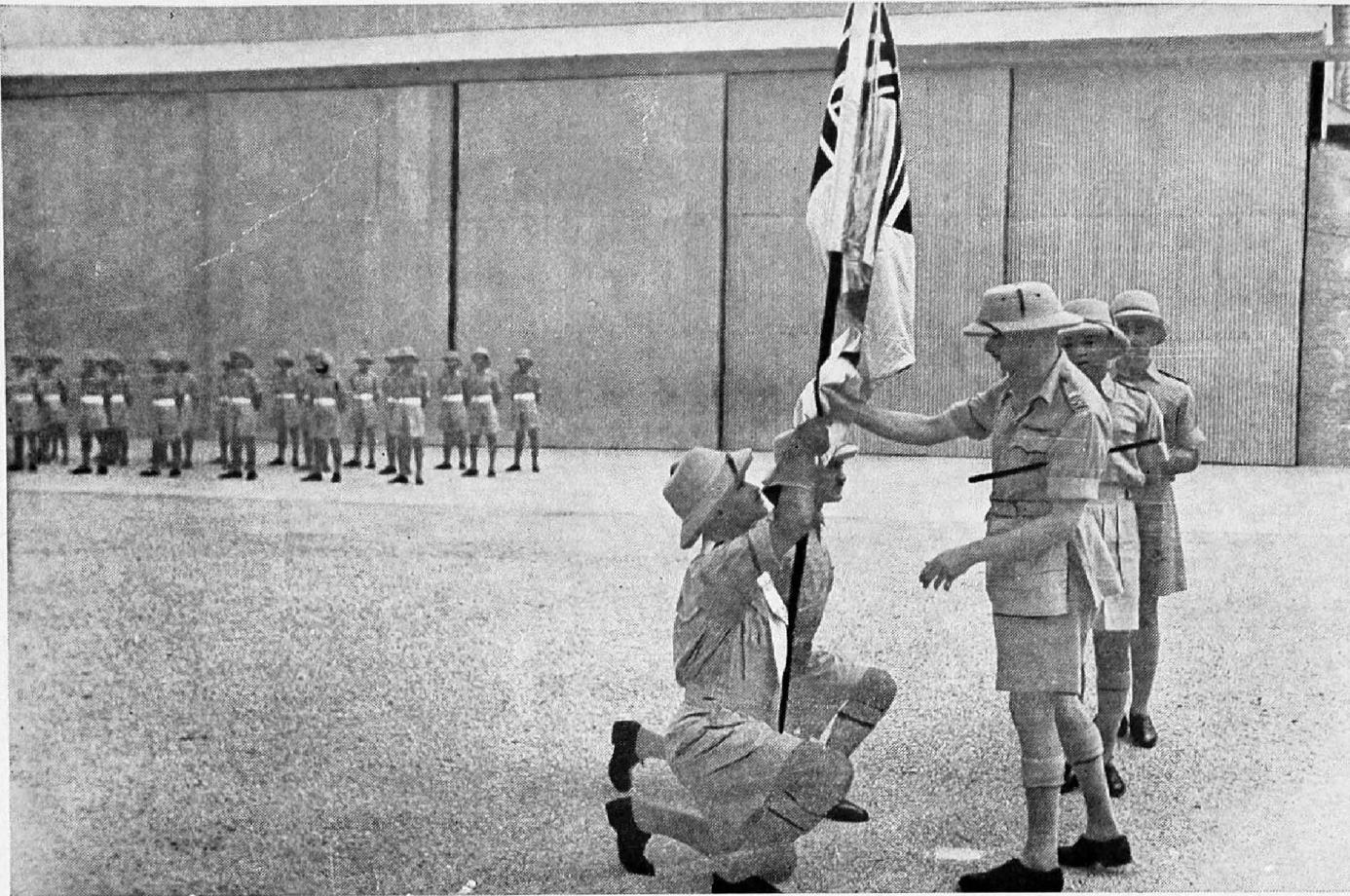
The squadron's next move was to Risalpur, the air party reaching there on 22 July and the main party on the 24th. The end of the war found the squadron engaged in training at this station.

No. 4 Squadron

No. 4 Squadron, formed at Peshawar on 1 February 1942, did not remain there for long. It moved to Kohat by 23 February and



Gp. Capt. (later Air Marshal) S. Mukerjee



H.R.H. the Duke of Gloucester presents colours to I.A.F. at Risalpur

the pilots immediately started their flying training in earnest. On 29 March the squadron had its first experience of operations when S./Ldr H.U. Khan, the Commanding Officer, took a flight of four aircraft to Miranshah to bomb Shirani. At the end of April 1942, 'A' Flight of the squadron moved one detachment to Miranshah for operations, remaining there till 2 September when it was relieved by a detachment of No. 3 Squadron. The squadron headquarters together with 'B' Flight remained at Kohat carrying out normal flying training, viz., supply dropping, formation flying, radar telephonic contact etc. On 17 September four aircraft followed by another on the 19th left for Hyderabad (Sind) for operations against the Hurs. On 21 October F/Lt. Majithia was sent thither for photographic reconnaissance, he being the only pilot in the squadron experienced in this work. Due to complete lack of photographic equipment, pilots could not be trained on this job. From 2 to 10 November was carried out an exercise in co-operation with the 7th Indian Division at Risalpur in which the squadron performed the role of a bomber squadron. Following this exercise three aircraft went on a tour of Kapurthala, Patiala, Nabha and Jind (20th) to demonstrate to the officers and troops of these States the various ways of air co-operation with the ground forces. Supply-dropping, formation-drill, radar telephonic contact, message picking and dropping, and dive attacks were included in the demonstrations. From 2 to 18 December further army co-operation exercises, including bombing, strafing and tactical reconnaissance, were carried out with the 7th Indian Division at Risalpur.

All the while, the detachment at Hyderabad was engaged in operations, carrying out photographic reconnaissance, contact reconnaissance, tactical reconnaissance, and supply dropping. On 30 January 1943 one aircraft was recalled from Hyderabad due to its having become unfit for operations. Two others were withdrawn in the second week of February. The other two carried on till April.

In June it was decided that the squadron should change its Lysanders for Hurricanes. The squadron accordingly moved to Risalpur between 12 and 17 June for a fighter reconnaissance course on Hurricanes. The course over, a move to Phaphamau was effected between 13 and 24 August, where Hurricane II C's were received. By 3 September sixteen aircraft had arrived bringing the squadron strength up to establishment.

On 21 September S/Ldr Janjua was posted to Amarda Road for air fighting training and S/Ldr. Baldie, R.A.F., was posted to the unit as commanding officer in his place. At the same time, two other officers—one R.A.F. and the other R.I.A.F.—came to take charge of the two flights. The squadron however lost its new commanding officer on the very day of his posting, by crashing on the way to Bairagarh, where it remained long enough to finish the

air gunnery course. In the first week of November it moved to Sulur. On 21 November, S/Ldr M.K. Janjua came back after completing his training and resumed command of the squadron. At Sulur were carried out exercises in co-operation with the 19th Division from 6 to 12 December. On 19 December the squadron left for Yelahanka, where intensive training was continued. On 3 February the squadron started on its way to Ranchi to undergo a low attack course. On the way there, sixteen Hurricanes II C aircraft fitted with universal bomb carriers were collected from 308 Maintenance Unit at Allahabad. The role of the squadron changed from fighter reconnaissance to fighter bomber. The low attack course commenced at Ranchi on 14 February and was completed by the end of the month. Only one accident took place in the course of this training.

After the course at Ranchi was over the squadron received orders for moving to Feni for operations. The move started on 4 March and was completed by the 9th. Some R.A.F. officers were posted to the squadron and the command was taken over by S/Ldr G.S. Sharp from S/Ldr Janjua who left for Air Headquarters (India) on posting.

Operations commenced on 15 April 1944, and continued for one year till 19 April 1945, when the squadron received orders to move to Yelahanka for rest and conversion to Spifires. The air party left Kyaukpyu on the 23rd, reaching Yelahanka on the 25th. The ground party reached on 2 May. By the end of May, 14 Spitfire VIIIIs were received and conversion training began on 1 June. The course was completed on 30 June according to schedule, the pilots having averaged twenty-two hours' flying on Spifires. Three flying accidents took place during training. The training was continued during the subsequent months, with special attention to formation flying and low-level attacks. On 2 August S/Ldr D.B. Berry relinquished command of the squadron and F/Lt. J. Chandra assumed temporary command pending arrival of S/Ldr E.W. Pinto on the 12th. On the 8th the remaining R.A.F. pilots were posted away. On 20 August, there was a V-J parade and fly-past at Madras in which the squadron took part. On the 28th General Sir Claude Auchinleck who inspected the squadron intimated the possibility of the squadron's proceeding to Japan as part of the R.A.F. occupation force.

No. 6 Squadron

The training of the aircrew of No. 6 Squadron took place at Risalpur. The training over, the pilots were sent to Allahabad and thence to Bhopal. Fifteen aircraft led by the squadron commander, S/Ldr Mehar Singh, left for Bhopal. Out of this number, six aircraft of 'B' Flight lost their way and forced-landed at Biora. The aircraft

suffered damage and pilot F/O Sanjana lost his life. At Bairagarh the squadron was hard at work, laying special stress on air to air and air to ground firing. Besides, the pilots received many theoretical lessons and did a lot of practical work on the ground. During the aircraft display at Ambala on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the Indian Air Force, the squadron won the first prize for the best looking aircraft.

On 13 April 1943, a detachment of three aircraft went to Nagpur to take part in an army co-operation exercise in the course of which message dropping, tactical reconnaissance, diving and strafing were done. The detachment returned on 27 April. For the whole of May 1943, the squadron underwent a course of army co-operation at the Infantry School at Saugor. The course included recognition of Allied and Japanese tanks and armoured vehicles and the recognition of the insignia of Allied and Japanese officers and other personnel. The course over, the squadron left for Cholavaram on 3 June. During a stay of two months there, besides lectures and practical work on many subjects, a number of army co-operation exercises was carried out. One exercise (Fog) took place at Ramnathapuram from the middle of June to 2 July. Messages were received after conclusion from H.Q. 173 Wing and A.O.C. H.Q. No. 225 Group praising the efficiency, enthusiasm, and excellent maintenance of aircraft of the squadron detachment sent there for the purpose. Another detachment of four aircraft went to Secunderabad on 2 July for exercises with the 44th Armoured Division which continued till 24 July. In the first week of August the squadron moved to Trichinopoly for a stay of one month. While most of the aircrew were engaged in intensive training here, a detachment at Ulunderpet under F/Lt Hassan took part in the exercise "Trump" from the 23rd to the 31st. On 5 September the squadron proceeded to Kalyan where two months were spent in intensive training. The squadron sent two detachments for army cooperation exercises at Kolhapur—one taking place in the middle of October and the other at the beginning of November.

On 3 November 1943 was received an order for the squadron's move to Cox's Bazar for operations. The advance party left on the 17th and the rest of the squadron followed by the 24th. The air party reached Cox's Bazar before the end of November and flew their first operational sortie on 30 November. At the beginning of June 1944 they were withdrawn from operations, the advance party leaving on the 6th and the air party on the 11th. By the 29th of the month the entire squadron reached Risalpur. The squadron stayed there till the middle of August when it moved to Kohat. On 19 September 'B' Flight of the squadron went as a detachment to Miranshah. On 25 December the squadron had a new commanding

officer, S/Ldr. J.M. Engineer, who took the place of W/Cdr Mehar Singh D.S.O. posted to Air Headquarters. Upto May 1945 a detachment was stationed at Miranshah for operations while the rest of the squadron at Kohat carried out normal flying training such as navigation, artillery reconnaissance, formation flying, technical reconnaissance, aerobatics, air to ground firing, photo reconnaissance, message dropping etc. On 13 January two pilots, F/O Dass and F/O Jagjit Singh who had been temporarily attached to the I.A.F. Display Flight, died as the result of an air accident. Later during the month a number of officers were posted to the Display Flight.

No. 7 Squadron

The training of the pilots of No. 7 Squadron at Peshawar passed off smoothly except for one mishap. At Phaphamau, where the squadron moved on 8 March 1943, further training was carried out for about two and a half months. On 21 May it moved to Bhopal to undergo armament and gunnery training at No. 1 Advanced Training Unit (A.T.U.) there. The course commenced on 31 May and was completed on 2 July.

On the completion of the course at Bhopal, the squadron proceeded to Campbellpur, reaching there on 4 July. At this station, the squadron stayed for nearly eight months. This fairly long stay gave the squadron an opportunity for uninterrupted training which was fully availed of. Normal flying, navigation, bombing and gunnery exercises were carried out. Training on frontier operations was gone through near Miranshah in November, and at Nowshera early in December. Some pilots went through a mountain warfare course at Kakul in September and October. Air Marshal Sir John Baldwin and other senior officers from Air Headquarters paid a visit to Campbellpur and a dummy operational exercise was successfully staged in November to enable them to assess the standard attained. A flight of the squadron flew exhibition flights for the War Services Exhibition at Nagpur in early December. Besides, the squadron also took part in air operations in the frontier in December and January, at first from Campbellpore and subsequently from Miranshah.

In February 1944, the squadron moved to Maharajpur in Gwalior to carry out exercises in co-operation with the ground forces which were being trained for Wingate's second expedition. It was during this move that the squadron suffered its worst mishap. The air party led by S/Ldr Chaudhury, taking off on the 19th, encountered very bad weather on the way and three crashes resulted. Two pilots F/O Rachpal Singh and F/O Ajit Singh with their crew lost their lives. Another pilot F/O Gocal crashlanded at the aerodrome at Lahore. The machine was wrecked but the crew escaped injury.

The rest of the air party was forced to land at Delhi, taking off the next day for their destination.

At Gwalior, from 1 to 8 March, close support exercises with Wingate's men were satisfactorily carried out and a letter of appreciation was received from Major-General Symes, M.C., Officer Commanding, Headquarters, Special Force. On 10 March the squadron started its move to Kumbhirgram for operations. The main air party consisting of fifteen Vengeance aircraft left on the 19th. By the 22nd the air party arrived at Uderbund airstrip twelve miles from Kumbhirgram. The tour lasted for three months, no operations taking place after 11 June. The air party left on the 12th and the move to Ranchi was completed by the 18th. The stay at Ranchi was for about one month only. During this period army co-operation exercises were carried out. Some flying accidents took place but none of them was serious. On 14 July, S/Ldr P.C. Lal assumed command of the squadron and soon after, the squadron started its move to Chhara, seventy-three miles west of Ranchi where an allotment of Vengeance Mark III aircraft was received.

The next three months were spent in normal flying and army co-operation exercises. Exercises with 255th Tank Brigade were held at Ranchi in August while exercises in co-operation with a brigade of 82nd West African-Division at Jhalida were held in August, September and October for short periods. The exercise in September in which 12 Vengeances gave demonstration of dive bombing was attended by pressmen. It proved to be very successful and the squadron earned the congratulations of the Brigade Commander for putting up an excellent performance.

The Vengeance aircraft were obsolescent and by this time the R.A.F. Vengeance units had all converted to Mosquitos. No. 7 Squadron I.A.F. also entertained hopes of being equipped with this type of aircraft but instead they were asked to convert to Hurricanes. The squadron accordingly started for Peshawar, and reached there on 16 November leaving all the Vengeance aircraft at Allahabad. The conversion to Hurricanes started on 18 November. The training programme envisaged 1200 hours' flying in the course of five weeks. An intensive effort was therefore called for. In the course of November the squadron flew $313\frac{1}{2}$ hours and in December 980 hours. Only the hard work and willing co-operation of the airmen enabled the flying training to be carried out according to schedule. They maintained all the aircraft in a perfect condition of serviceability and this was all the more creditable as the airmen were unused to servicing the Hurricanes and had to learn their job at the same time.

In the middle of January, one flight of the squadron moved to Kohat, the other following in the beginning of February. Towards the end of February a detachment carried out army co-operation

exercises at Peshawar from 27 February to 2 March. The squadron became fully operational by the end of February. About the middle of March Air Vice-Marshal M. Thomas, the Air Officer Commanding in India visited Kohat and a complete dummy exercise was carried out. Soon afterwards the squadron moved for the second time for operations in Burma. The air party left Kohat on 21 March 1945, reaching Imphal on the 24th and Sinthe on the 26th. Operations were carried out till 22 May and five days later the squadron commenced its withdrawal from Magwe, and returned to Kohat. At Samungli, where the squadron was now posted, the squadron received two important visits in July, one from Air Vice-Marshal Thomas, A.O.C., India Command, and the other from Air Chief Marshal, Sir Keith Park, Allied Air Commander-in-Chief, South-East Asia Command. The end of the war found the squadron making preparation for anti-malarial D.D.T. spraying from the air.

No. 8 Squadron

No. 8 Squadron, after its training at Peshawar assembled at Phaphamau on 25 June 1943. On 12 August the aircrew proceeded to Bhopal for training, while the squadron headquarters moved to Bamrauli on 23 August. The air crew finished the course at the Advance Training Unit at Bhopal in September and then proceeded to Chhara early in October. At Chhara an intensive training programme consisting of dive-bombing, formation flying, cross-country etc. was carried through. Great exertions were made to bring the unit to operational standard and by the end of November 1943, the general standard of performance improved considerably. The air crew were below establishment strength and as there was a shortage of Indian pilots, some RAF pilots were posted to the unit during November. The maintenance personnel carried out their jobs with skill, though difficulties were experienced for want of spares.

On 2 December, the squadron started its move to Double Moorings, 3 miles from Chittagong, for operations. The move was completed by the 13th. Operations were carried out till 7 July 1944. The air party reached Samungli on 20 July. Five aircraft had to be left at intermediate stations due to various troubles. The rail party reached on the 29th.

There was little flying in August due mainly to lack of equipment and attack of malaria. During September and early October training was intensive. On 9 October it was known that the squadron would convert to Spitfire Mk VIII. The squadron accordingly commenced its move to Amarda Road on 15 October and completed it by the 31st. The Vengeances were handed over to 309 Maintenance Unit, Jodhpur. Four Spitfires had been received at Samungli before the squadron moved out. While ferrying them to Amrada

Road, W/o Stroud crashed just after take-off near the runway due to engine failure. The aircraft burnt out and the pilot lost his life.

The conversion course on Spitfire began in November. The pilots started training on Spitfire V, converting later to Mark VIII. Nine pilots were posted away, being found unsuitable for flying Spitfires. In December, nine Indian pilots having experience of flying Spitfires in the United Kingdom joined the squadron in replacement of those who had left and extra lectures were arranged for them. The course came to an end on 23 December and the squadron became the first Spitfire unit in the Indian Air Force. It was not, however, wholly Indian in composition. It was in reality a Commonwealth squadron, having British, Australian, New Zealander and Canadian, besides Indian personnel on its rolls. The Indian pilots formed one flight while the rest formed the other.

No sooner had the squadron completed its training than it was again ordered to the operational area. On 28 December, only five days after the completion of training, the air party comprising sixteen Spitfires left for "George" airstrip, fifteen miles south of Cox's Bazar. Operations were carried out first from this strip and then from Akyab till 23 February when the squadron was withdrawn to Baigachi for the defence of Calcutta. At Baigachi the squadron remained in readiness from dawn to dusk to meet Japanese raiders but none came and time was spent in extensive training. On 17 May readiness for the defence of Calcutta was relaxed as the risk of Japanese air raid was considered to have passed. Henceforward the squadron busied itself entirely with training till 15 July when orders came for the squadron to move to Mingaladon airfield. The squadron left by boat on the 22nd under the command of S/Ldr J.S. Humphreys who had taken over charge on 5 June from M.W. Coombes, and took over the machines of No. 607 squadron on the last day of the month. The squadron commenced operations next day and was the only I.A.F. squadron which was on active duty at the time of the Japanese surrender.

No. 9 Squadron

No. 9 Squadron's training was carried out at Bhopal, which did not commence till 1 February 1944. Training included air to ground and air to air firing, squadron and flight formation flying, rhubarb and climbing. On 9 March 1944, S/Ldr. K.A. Perkin took over command and two weeks later the squadron started its move to Kulaura, completing it by the 29th. Soon after, on 4 April, fifteen aeroplanes left for Amarda Road to attend an airfiring course, which commenced on the 6th and came to an end on the 24th with a total of 350 hours of flying. The aircraft flew back to Kulaura the same day for operations. The operational tour lasted for one year till the middle of April 1945, when the squadron was withdrawn

to Ranchi for conversion to Spitfires Mk VIII. It reached Ranchi on 1 May. The conversion training started on 7 May and was completed in July. The course included formation flying, fighter tactics, bombing and air to ground firing.

When the war ended in August, several non-Indian pilots were repatriated and Indians took their place. On 28 August S/Ldr M. Asghar Khan assumed command. The squadron remained at Ranchi till 16 October when it left for Calcutta in the first hop of its journey to Hmawbi on 22 November while the air party left Baigachi on 30 November reaching Hmawbi the same day. The outstanding work of the squadron during the next two months of its stay in Burma was a fly-past in the Pegu area for warning dacoits and hostile elements, escorting Lord Louis Mountbatten from Rangoon to Bangkok on 18 January 1946 in conjunction with No. 10 Squadron IAF and participation in peace celebrations there on the following day. On 24 January the squadron left for Delhi to take part in the Victory Celebrations.

No. 10 Squadron

No. 10 Squadron, formed on 20 February 1944 at Lahore continued there till 10 May. Flying training commenced on 24 March and included formation flying, night flying etc. but there was no gun-firing exercise due to lack of facilities. On 10 April and the following days the squadron took part in the air display in connection with the War Services Exhibition at Lahore. On 10 May 1944, the squadron moved to Risalpur and stayed there up to the end of June. Training was continued there and the air crew attended lectures on aircraft recognition at Peshawar from 16 to 18 May.

On 1 July the move to Amarda Road commenced, the air party completing the journey on the 4th. The pilots attended an air firing course from 6 to 22 July. On 23 July the squadron left for its new base at Chhara where it remained for nearly four months. During this period the squadron remained split; one flight staying at Chhara and the other, first at Salboni and then at Dhubulia. The detachment at Chhara carried out normal flying exercises including formation flying, low-level cross-country flights, quarter attack etc., while the flight at Salboni—the two flights took their turn here alternately—carried out affiliation exercises with a Liberator squadron stationed there, besides formation flying, low-level cross-country, and ground attacks. The squadron also had air to ground firing practice at the Ranchi range from 29 August to 1 September and air to sea firing at Ramnagar range from 30 October to 1 November.

At the beginning of November it was learnt that the squadron was to have the role of a Hurri-Bomber squadron. On 6 and 7 November eight aircraft left for Agartala, to be fitted with bomb

racks. The squadron then moved to Ranchi for a short bombing and strafing course, which started on 14 November and was completed by the end of the month. From the 21st onwards live bombs were used during practice. The squadron experimented with high-level bombing—diving from 6,000 feet and releasing bombs at 4,000 feet—which was found more accurate than low-level bombing. A fatal accident—the first in the squadron—took place on 15 November when F/O Chakerbery failed to recover from a dive and crashed. The accident was believed due either to a landing-lamp-panel flying out or to a high speed stall. Following this accident the landing light panels on all the machines were modified suitably.

Early in December the squadron moved to Ramu in Arakan for operations, which started on 23 December and continued till 18 April. Between 21 and 23 April the squadron left for Yelahanka, near Bangalore, the air party reaching on 24 April and the ground party on 8 May. It was immediately ordered to Trichinopoly for converting to Spitfires. Though the move was completed by 11 May, the conversion course did not commence for more than two months for lack of aircraft. After waiting in vain for some time, the air crew turned to their worn-out Hurricanes and did some flying on them. On 17 July two Spitfires were received and by the 23rd, four more came and it was possible to start flying on Spitfires from the 24th. Height climbs, quarter and rolling attacks, dogfights, formation flying etc. were carried through. All the pilots completed fifteen hours' flying by 4 September and then began air to ground firing practice which was over on the 7th.

In November the squadron was asked to proceed again to Burma. The unit had in the meantime changed in composition and personnel. On 19 June the first commanding officer S/Ldr. R.S.T. Doe left and was succeeded by F/Lt. (later promoted S/Ldr.) R.W. Jones R.A.F. When the latter was repatriated to the United Kingdom, F/Lt. J. Adamson took his place. Non-Indian personnel began to leave in August, and in the course of November all R.A.F. officers were posted away excepting the commanding officer. The unit became entirely Indian on 5 January 1946, when S/Ldr H. Raza assumed command.

On 1 November, the squadron air party consisting of fourteen Spitfires Mk VIII and one Harvard left Trichinopoly and after staying for three weeks at Ulunderpet proceeded to Hmawbi which they reached on the 25th. The squadron remained there till 15 February when it left for India. During this period, it co-operated with No. 8 and No. 9 I.A.F. Squadrons in an all I.A.F. Wing formation fly-past in January 1946 and a detachment of six aircraft together with six more aircraft of No. 9 Squadron escorted the Supreme Allied Commander to Bangkok.

CHAPTER III

ORGANISATION OF AIR HEADQUARTERS, INDIA

Headquarters Prior to 1939

Air Headquarters, India, existed only as a small organisation in the Defence Headquarters before September 1939. The role of the diminutive air forces in India was limited, which was to act with the Army in defending the North-West Frontier where they were employed on "watch and ward", controlling the areas up to the Afghan border adjacent to the frontier, and in internal and coastal defence, although arrangements for coastal defence existed only on paper. They had a Group Headquarters at Peshawar, five stations at Kohat, Peshawar, Risalpur, Ambala and Lahore, and an aircraft depot at Karachi. Air Headquarters administered 249 officers and 1,931 airmen of the R.A.F. and only 13 officers and 126 airmen of the Indian Air Force, in which there was only one squadron at one flight strength.

There were only 21 officers including 2 civilians and 3 officers for air force works for which technical responsibility lay with the Engineer-in-Chief at Army Headquarters. The figures exclude one army officer working on army-air cooperation in the Military Training Directorate at Army Headquarters.

The Headquarters was comparable in size with a Group Headquarters of the Royal Air Force in the United Kingdom. It was organised on lines long obsolete elsewhere. An air marshal was air officer commanding with one flight lieutenant as personal staff officer. The staff consisted of a single branch under an air commodore as senior air staff officer. A wing commander was responsible for organisation, and a squadron leader for administration. These subjects were not considered in a separate administrative branch of the staff. Other duties allotted to it were as follows :—

Operations and Intelligence	1 S/Ldr ; 1 F/Lt.
Training	1 W/Comdr.
Armaments	1 S/Ldr.
Signals	1 Wg/Comdr; 1 F/Lt.
Personnel	1 S/Ldr ; 2 F/Lts.
Equipment	1 G/Capt. ; 1 S/Ldr. ; 2 F/Lt.
Engineering	2 Wg/Comdrs. ; 1 F/Lt.
Central Co-ordination	1 Civilian.

In addition, one group captain was borne on the establishment, whilst employed as an instructor at the Staff College, Quetta.

Progress in 1939-40

By the end of 1939 the Indian Air Force had increased to a full squadron and a small training organisation was set up. External events limited air force expansion in 1940 but such expansion as there was, produced concomitant problems of organisation, equipment and training while bigger operational commitments and the growing emphasis on coastal defence also threw additional work on the staff at Air Headquarters.

Operational and administrative duties could not continue longer in a solitary branch. Air Headquarters was, therefore, reorganised in two main branches on the generally accepted pattern. By the middle of 1940 the officer strength had more than doubled the figures of 1939. The air staff remained under a senior air staff officer and the new administrative branch was headed, until November 1941, by a group captain known as Staff Officer in charge of Administration (SOA), and afterwards by an Air Officer in charge of Administration (AOA).

The Air Staff was organised in sections for :—

TRAINING	INTELLIGENCE
War Schools	Own forces in India Own forces outside India Enemy forces within striking distance of India
Striking force	Defence of India Field Watch and Ward Component Room.
The Administrative ORGANISATION	Sections were :—
Administration Budgeting Planning	PERSONNEL Officers Recruiting Application of regulations Central Section (Camp Commandant) Discipline

The Staffs to the services comprised :—

Armaments	Medical
Navigation	Ciphers
Photography	Works services
Signals	Finance
Equipment	Engineering.

Growth in 1941-43

The expansion of the air forces gathered more speed in 1941. At the end of the year the combined strength of the R.A.F.

and I.A.F. was 1,097 officers and 6,583 others, the latter figure besides airmen included civilians, followers and other non-combatants. The authorised strength of Air Headquarters was 48 officers including 5 civilians, 35 British Other Ranks and 102 Indian clerks.

The turning point in the growth of the air force came in 1942. The Japanese threatened Eastern India and Ceylon. The Army in Burma withdrew. Air Headquarters shouldered the whole weight of responsibility for air operations stretching beyond the India Command, including Ceylon, into Burma and the Bay of Bengal. Air Chief Marshal Sir Richard Peirse was appointed AOC-in-C India on 3 March 1942 and continued to hold the command till November 1944 when he was appointed Allied Air C-in-C South-East Asia Command. To ensure that the importance of the I.A.F. was fully understood by all concerned, both Indian and British, and that any matter, even of small detail, could be brought to his notice, he appointed to his personal staff H.H. the Nawab of Bhopal and the Maharaja of Jodhpur as Honorary Air Commodores. After Peirse's appointment a vast programme of airfield construction was sanctioned in May. Personnel and equipment arrived from the United Kingdom. Some units of the United States Army Air Force entered India. Recruiting, now co-ordinated under the Adjutant-General's Branch at the General Headquarters, was intensified. Expansion of the I.A.F. also advanced. The development of communications and training of operators ; extension of the Observer Corps and the warning system ; the installation and manning of radar direction finding stations ; the formation of a balloon branch ; a great increase of training establishments ; all imposed a large burden of work on Air Headquarters. In July 1942 the authorised establishment and its actual strength stood at 284 (214) officers and 268 (410) BORs supported by a ministerial staff of 7 gazetted civilians and 186 (225) Indian clerks.

During 1943 operational functions at Air Headquarters changed over from defence to offence. Work on the planning of new airfields and their operation as they became usable continued. The supply of aircraft improved ; more squadrons arrived ; a scheme for substituting British by Indian airmen in R.A.F. non-operational units was prepared and put in hand ; Indian Air Training Corps at the universities were inaugurated and training schools were further expanded. With these increases came a vast development of ancillary services and organizations touching signal communications, the warning system, direction finding, balloon units, air-sea rescue, the R.A.F. Regiment, the meteorological and flying control services, intelligence, photographic interpretation, medical organisation, education, welfare and catering. These increases were reflected in the size of Air Headquarters in July 1943.

The strength was :—

	<i>Officers</i>		<i>Airmen</i>		<i>Civilians</i>	
	IAF	RAF	IAF	RAF	Gazetted	Non-Gazetted
Authorised	141	659	34	1537	9	435
Actual	28	539	9	1385	9	426

The strength of the combined air forces in October 1943 was 6,230 officers and 115,875 other ranks. Of these the I.A.F. comprised 911 officers and 40,146 other ranks (including 20,068 non-combatants)

Status after Setting Up of ACSEA and BAFSEA

The status and stature of Air Headquarters underwent a notable change in November 1943 when Headquarters, Air Command South-East Asia (ACSEA) and Headquarters Base Air Forces South-East Asia (BAFSEA) were set up at first in New Delhi, under a Supreme Allied Commander, South-East Asia (SACSEA). From this time on it lost much of its former importance. The Air Officer Commanding, India Command, as he was now to be designated, became responsible to the Commander-in-Chief for specified aspects of India's defence and internal security, including watch and ward on the North-West Frontier ; for anti-aircraft co-operation training and for control and administration of the Royal Air Force units at the disposal of the Commander-in-Chief and of the Indian Air Force units not allotted to SACSEA. Consequently, all I.A.F. units outside the boundaries of India Command came under ACSEA for operations and administration. At the same time BAFSEA, acting under ACSEA, took over complete administrative control of the majority of the RAF units in India.

At the beginning of 1943 an Inspectorate General had been formed, independent of Air Headquarters for the purpose of fostering the adolescent I.A.F. On the creation of ACSEA the Inspectorate was absorbed into the reformed A.H.Q. (I) where appointments were to be filled increasingly thereafter by officers of the Indian Air Force.

The sanctioned strength of Air Headquarters under the re-organisation of November 1943 was :—

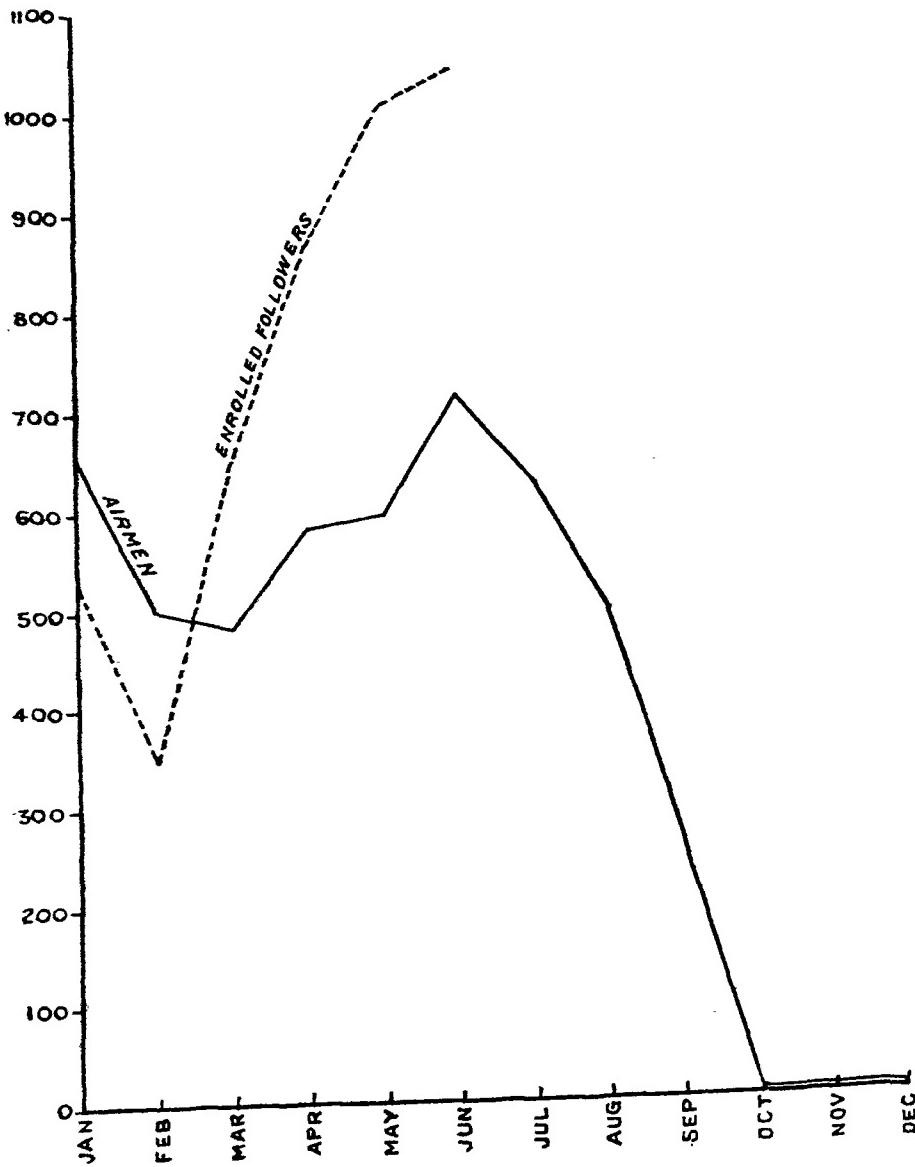
	<i>Officers</i>			<i>Other Ranks</i>		<i>Ministerial and inferior establishment</i>		
	RIAF	RAF	WAC	RIAF	RAF	Gazetted Officers	Indian Clerks	Inferior personnel
				(1)				
	677	3	50	1692	12		412	523

An organisation chart is provided in appendix A. A few minor increases were authorized up to the end of the war including a command catering officer in February 1945 and a combined air demobilization planning staff in the following June. The final establishment and the organisation of its duties are given in Appendix

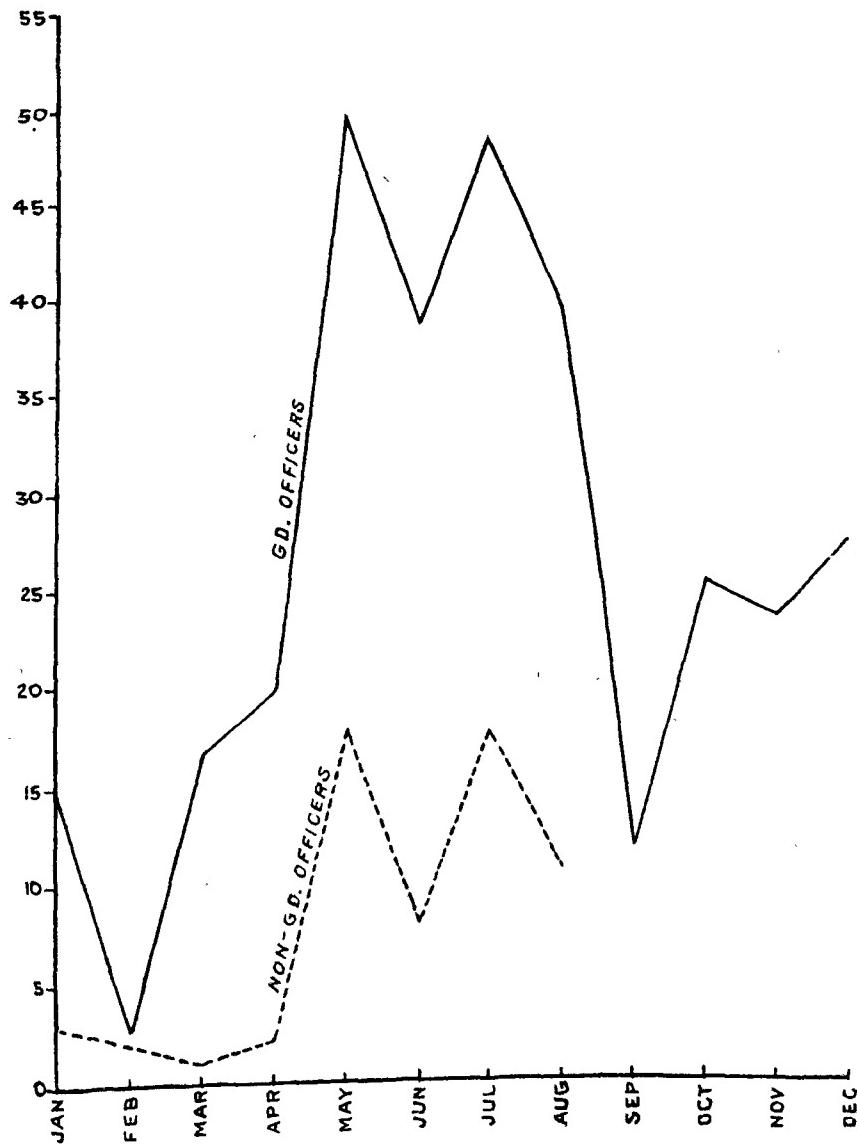
B. This however, does not include an important addition sanctioned on 15 August 1945, and involving an overall increase of 23 officers. The increase arose from the decision of the Government of India that the training of the IAF, which was essentially an Indian force, should devolve constitutionally on Air Headquarters. Training of the IAF was, therefore, transferred on this date from BAFSEA to India Command. With this strengthening of Air Headquarter, the designation of Air Officer Commanding, India, was changed in April 1946, to AOC-in-C, India, and his rank was raised to that of Air Marshal.

I. A. F. STATISTICS
DURING THE 12 MONTHS JAN - DEC 1945

RECRUITMENT OF AIRMEN AND ENROLLED FOLLOWERS



RECRUITMENT OF GD. AND NON-GD. OFFICERS



CHAPTER IV

RECRUITMENT

OFFICERS

The Indian Air Force was entirely manned by an Indian personnel service. Officers were either General Duty (pilots), or non-flying personnel. Recruitment was on an all-India basis, without restriction as to class or caste. However, a sprinkling of selected Royal Air Force (RAF) personnel was attached for purposes of training and supervision until the Indian element was able to assume full responsibility for those duties.

Regular Cadre

Before the War, officers were recruited by means of a competitive examination held by the Federal Public Service Commission in the same way as the officers of the Royal Indian Navy and the Indian Army. Candidates accepted were sent to England for training at the R.A.F. College at Cranwell. This training was for two years, and was followed by attachment to other R.A.F. establishments, including a course at the School of Army Co-operation Training.

Candidates must have passed the matriculation examination or its equivalent, and be between the ages of 18 and 20 years, and had to conform to certain prescribed physical standards. In addition, a small number of officers was obtained by secondment from the Indian army. The grant of regular commissions was suspended from December 1939, but emergency commissions were not introduced until January 1942.

Outbreak of War

On the outbreak of war the immediate expansion of the Service resulted in an urgent need of officers, and their recruitment and training became the direct responsibility of Air Headquarters, India. All officers were, on completion of their training, granted temporary commissions in the Indian Air Force Volunteer Reserve (IAFVR). This reserve was created by an Act (No. XXXVI) of 1939, which received the consent of the Governor General on 29 September 1939. Age limits were from 18 to 22 years, and the minimum educational qualification for General Duty Officers was matriculation or its equivalent, but preference was given to those possessing higher educational qualifications.

In the early days of the war accepted candidates were sent to the Initial Training School at Risalpur, (later Walton), for elementary flying training, and were commissioned on entering the

school. Subsequently candidates were sent to the different Flying Clubs for preliminary flying experience, and then to an Initial Training School (ITS). On successfully completing their training at the ITS, officers were sent to the Service Flying Training School at Ambala for service training.

Selection Boards

AHQ (I) Selection Boards were instituted in September 1939. They toured India, and selected candidates with previous civil flying experience. Candidates selected were commissioned from the date of reporting for duty. Representatives of the Director of Civil Aviation were co-opted to these Selection Boards in June 1940, and candidates not considered suitable for direct entry to the Service were given the opportunity of participating in the civil flying training scheme, with a view to ultimate service in the Indian Air Force.

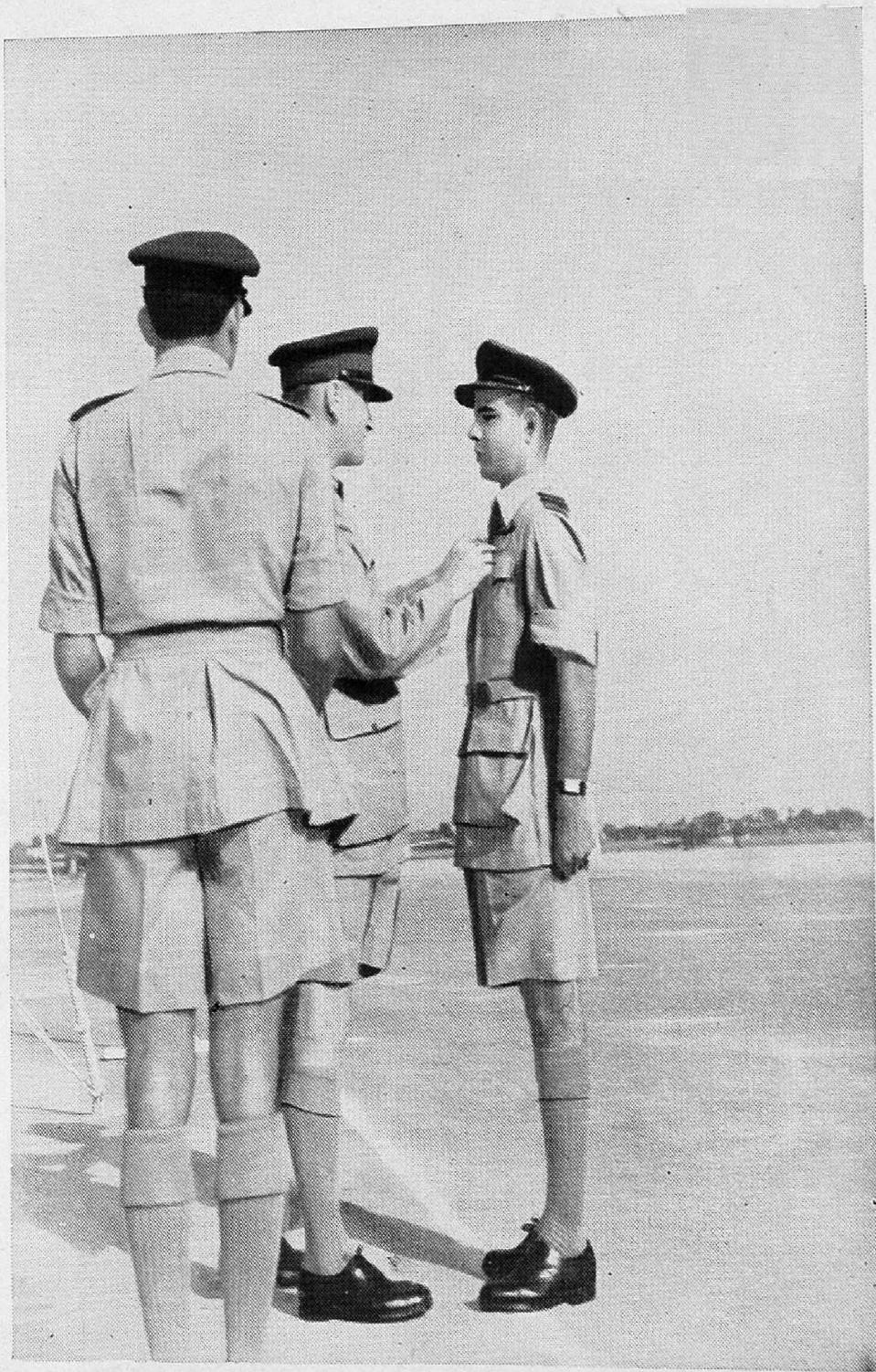
Early in 1940, candidates with previous civil flying experience were not available. Candidates without any previous flying experience, were forthcoming in large numbers. Hence it became necessary to alter the conditions of recruitment and candidates then entered the Service as officer cadets, instead of as commissioned officers. They were posted to Initial Training Wings, which were opened in 1940.

Director of Civil Aviation

In September 1940, the Director of Civil Aviation assumed entire responsibility for the recruitment of officers. Selection Boards, which included officers of the IAF, were formed under his control, and candidates selected were sent to Civil Flying Clubs for preliminary flying training, during which period they received a subsistence allowance of Rs. 100 a month. On successful completion of this training, and if required, they entered the IAF as officer cadets.

The first such Board toured India during October and November 1940. The result was poor. Only 129 candidates were accepted out of a total of 835 interviewed. The Board made the following recommendations :—

- (a) That a definite understanding should be given that all candidates who completed their civil flying training satisfactorily, would be posted to the I.A.F.
- (b) In view of the high percentage (approximately 40%) of candidates found medically unfit, the required standards of physical fitness should be widely advertised.
- (c) The prescribed educational standard should be relaxed, as undue importance had been attached to a university degree.



Gen. Sir Claude Auchinleck, C-in-C India, decorating Wg. Cdr. A.M. Engineer
with D.F.C.



An informal group with Gp. Capt. Proud

These recommendations were accepted, the most notable being the reduction of the minimum educational standard to that of matriculation only.

A. & S. D. Branch

Until the Administration and Special Duties Branch was formed in 1940, attention had been directed to the recruitment of officer candidates for flying duties. Candidates for ground duties were first interviewed at Air Headquarters in May 1941 and commissioned in September of that year. Commissions were granted for various duties, such as flying, administration, intelligence, photography, navigation and recruiting. Age limits were from 21 to 50 years. Other qualifications were the same as for general duty officers recruited to the IAFVR.

Amalgamation of Recruiting Organisation

Shortly after the constitution of an inter-services recruiting organisation, the DCA's civil flying training scheme ceased to function, and all candidates for commissions in the IAF were selected through the Preliminary and Central Interview Boards.

In August 1942, the partial Indianisation of RAF units in India resulted in a sudden demand for ground duty officers. Recruitment figures for the aircrew personnel, showed a decline.

Indian Air Training Corps (IATC)

Indian Air Training Units were formed in February 1943, at five selected universities as an experimental measure. These units were originally introduced to recruit technicians for the I.A.F. Later it was found that an average student had an impression that service in the ranks of the I.A.F. meant a loss to his prestige and status. The response in the form of enrolment in the I.A.T.C. courses and subsequent entry in the I.A.F. was not therefore encouraging. Owing to the unsatisfactory position of aircrew recruitment from outside sources, and to make the public "air conscious", the I.A.T.C. was converted in October 1943 into a pre-entry organisation for recruitment of officers into the General Duties Branch of the I.A.F. The I.A.T.C. was then in operation at all the nineteen universities in India, with four additional detachments at affiliated colleges.

Although the I.A.T.C. was started to meet war-time requirements of the I.A.F., its aims were two-fold: (a) to stimulate officer recruitment for the I.A.F., and (b) to create air-mindedness amongst the educated youth of the country.

Judging by the number of cadets who volunteered for I.A.T.C. training, and also by the number selected by the Services Selection

Board for the G.D. Branch, the scheme in general showed justifiable results.

General Duty Recruiting Officers (GDROs)

Opening up of recruiting for Ground Duty officers, combined with the high incidence of rejection by Services Selection Boards caused a considerable decline in the intake figures for the General Duty Branch. Accordingly, in September 1943 sanction was obtained as a temporary measure for the introduction of five General Duty Recruiting Officers. For this purpose India was divided into five areas, and each GDRO was allotted an area in which he vigorously toured, interviewed prospective candidates, and recommended those he considered suitable for final interview by a Services Selection Board. At the same time a clause was added to the terms and conditions of service for the A & SD Branch to the effect that candidates below the age of 26 years (this being the upper age limit for pilots) would not be considered for that Branch unless they were permanently medically unfit for flying duties. This age limit was later raised to 28 years.

The tours of the five General Duty Recruiting Officers resulted in an appreciable increase in the number of candidates accepted, and it was decided in March 1944 to place the General Duty Recruiting Officer system on a permanent basis, to increase the number of officers to ten, and reduce the size of their areas accordingly. In July 1944, General Duty Recruiting Officers were incorporated into the DAAG recruiting teams.

IAF Display Flight

To afford a further stimulus to I.A.F. officer recruitment, especially for pilots, it was decided at the end of November 1944, to form an I.A.F. Display Flight. The flight toured the main centres of India, gave demonstration flights, and a limited number of free passenger flights to potential candidates and their relations, as well as to prominent officials and non-officials.

It was hoped that this would bring home to the educated public the existence of the I.A.F. and so make them air-minded. It would also encourage young men of a suitable type to volunteer for service in the I.A.F.

A co-ordinated maximum effort was put forth in respect of publicity, advertising and recruiting. One GDRO preceded the flight to make advance arrangements, and another followed to interview candidates coming forward as a result of the visit of the flight.

The primary object of the flight—to stimulate interest in the I.A.F.—was fully achieved. All demonstrations were well attended, and the free passenger flights were most popular.

The secondary aim—to increase the number of suitable applicants—was not so successful. For example, during the tour of the flight between Peshawar and Amritsar, 827 candidates came forward; 99 General Duty and 65 Ground Duty candidates were selected by GDROs, but of these only 3 for General Duties and 1 for Ground Duties were passed by SSB.

On 1 November 1943 the Recruiting Directorate had a standard demand to produce 70 approved and medically fit General Duty Volunteers. The training wastage of applicants produced was abnormally heavy and in February 1944 the demand was raised to 104 per month. In spite of the various measures undertaken, the flow of the required number of recruits could not be obtained. The total intake into I.T.W. from all sources, *viz.*, I.A.F. airmen, ex-army cadets, candidates recommended by Service Selection boards and recruits obtained by the Recruiting Directorate from the time the demand was increased to 104 a month were:—

1944

March	—	Nil
April	—	38
May	—	46
June	—	43
July	—	Nil
August	—	44
September	—	33
October	—	21
November	—	Nil
December	—	23

1945

January	—	23
February	—	Nil
March	—	16
April	—	21
May	—	41
June	—	Nil
July	—	35
August	—	45
	—	—
	429	—
	—	—

This unhappy result has been attributed to a lack of drive and unsound recruiting publicity. Early advertisements highlighted the attraction of the pay offered and the openings in civil postwar aviation. This brought in men without the requisite qualities for a

fighter pilot. The advantages of offering a permanent career to men of a suitable type are obvious, and later publicity stressed the prestige attaching to a pilot in the I.A.F.

Ground Duty Officers

On 1 November 1943 no ceiling existed for Ground Duty Officers and the Recruiting Directorate was hampered by the uncertainty of requirements. It was not until September 1944 that Air Command, South-East Asia, produced a firm ceiling, by branches, of their requirements. This showed a need for additional 433 officers over and above the existing strength. This was approved by the Government of India and a demand placed on the Recruiting Directorate. Results again were disappointing, only 13 approved candidates from all sources being recruited up to 1 May 1945. This was stated to be largely because Ground Duty Commissions were allowed only to candidates over the age of 28 or medically unfit for flying duties. Many youngmen who were unwilling to fly would accept an administrative commission but were debarred by the age restriction. In the months between May and August (inclusive) 55 candidates were accepted for Ground Duty Commissions. At the end of August recruiting ceased.

OTHER RANKS

Before the War, Other Rank recruitment was the responsibility of No. 1 Squadron, I.A.F. As in the case of officers, it was on an all-India basis, without distinction as to class or caste. Airmen were engaged either as apprentices or on direct entry terms.

Recruits for the following trades were enrolled as apprentices : Electrician, Fitter Armourer, Fitter Aero Engineer, Fitter Driver, Patrol, Metal Rigger, Wireless Operator Mechanic, and Wireless Operator. This period of apprenticeship was normally two years. Recruits had to be between 18 and 22 years of age and to have passed matriculation examination or its equivalent. In addition, a working knowledge of English was required, this being the official language of the Service. Physical standards were the same as for combatants of the Indian army. On completion of their apprenticeship, and after successfully passing trade and educational tests, apprentices were enrolled as regular airmen for 9 years of regular service and 6 years of reserve service. Re-engagement up to 21 years' regular service was permissible.

Recruits for trades other than those enumerated above were enrolled on direct entry terms as regular airmen for 9 years of regular service, and 6 years in the reserve. Age limits and educational qualifications for direct entrants were the same as for apprentices.

The period of enrolment in the IAFVR was intended to be for a period of five years, extendable by further periods, each of not

more than five years. Recruitment, however, began after the outbreak of war, and enrolments were effected for the duration of war and not for periods of five years. Recruits had to be between the ages of 18 and 38, and should have had a good education, normally not below that of the matriculation standard.

Outbreak of War

In September 1939, recruitment came under the direct control of Air Headquarters. It was carried out by means of a touring Board consisting of a President, a technical adviser, and a medical officer. Recruitment to the regular cadre ceased, and from June 1940, all recruits were enrolled in the IAF for the duration of the war and for so long thereafter as their services might be required.

From November 1943, the lower age limit was reduced from 18 to 17½ years and the upper age limit was increased from 22 to 38 years. The standard of education was lowered for certain trade groups, candidates for which were required to answer simple questions and to speak and write English. Direct entry was adopted for all trades, and the educational passing-out examinations were abolished.

In September 1940, Air Force Recruiting Officers were established at the Army Technical Recruiting Offices in Lahore, Karachi, Madras, Bombay and Calcutta. Air Force Officers from local Air Force units were placed in charge of these offices, and functioned as part-time Recruiting Officers.

DCAs Reserve Training Scheme

This scheme, introduced towards the end of 1940, had as its purpose the raising and maintenance of a reserve of airmen for the I.A.F. Under it the Director of Civil Aviation recruited and trained personnel, who were later absorbed in the IAF as and when required. The scheme was financed from funds controlled by the Director of Civil Aviation, but recruits engaged received IAF rates of pay, which were debited to Air Force funds.

Permanent IAF Recruiting Offices

In September 1941, there was a further expansion in the IAF, and to meet ever-increasing demands, permanent Air Force Recruiting Offices were established at Lahore, Bombay, Calcutta and Madras. These were located in the same buildings as Army Technical Recruiting Offices, and replaced the part-time Recruiting Officers referred to above. When, in December 1942, the responsibility for recruitment to the IAF was assumed by the Director of Recruiting, the four officers in charge of these offices became advisers on IAF recruitment to the Technical Recruiting Officers in whose areas they had been recruiting.

By December 1942, the number of Air Force Recruiting Officers in the field was increased to eight. This number was, however, not sufficient to explain the complicated and various needs of the IAF to the army recruiting staff and to the public. In January 1943 it was therefore increased to sixteen, and by the end of that year it had risen to thirty-eight.

Recruiting Touring Parties

Late in 1942 six IAF technical recruiting touring parties were formed. Their functions were to operate in technical recruiting areas, and visit colleges and schools for the purpose of stimulating recruitment to the Service. Those parties did not form part of the recruiting organisation, but were borne on the establishment of Air Headquarters. They operated solely in the interests of IAF recruitment, and were analogous to Army regimental recruiting parties, although they did not carry out any actual enrolment. In addition, a widespread press advertising campaign was launched, supported by press publicity organised by the Director of Public Relations.

The effect of these measures was immediately felt, and the intake for January 1943 was almost double of that for the previous months, whilst the intake for February 1943 was again almost twice as much as for January. Thereafter a steady increase was maintained. In April 1943, as a result of the improved intake, demands were raised to 2,750 per month, and were met, almost in full, for the first time in June 1943. Thereafter the intake slowly declined. Demands also decreased, but from the beginning of 1944 until 31 August 1945, when recruitment to the IAF was suspended, supply was never more than approximately 60% of the demand. By August 1945, monthly demands had dropped to 930.

Group Allotment Scheme

The high rate of wastage at Recruits' Training Centres had for some time been the cause of anxiety. It was mainly due to the system of enrolment, whereby recruits were allotted trades at the time of engagement. Owing to the lack of standardisation in this system, and as Army Technical Recruiting Officers were not fully competent to allot trades, a large proportion of recruits, when they arrived at a Recruits' Training Centre was found unsuited for training in the particular trades to which they had been allotted.

In April 1944, it was therefore decided that, to reduce this high rate of wastage, recruits on enrolment would be allotted to a trade group, and not to a particular trade. It was also decided that, at the time of enrolment, recruits would be given a standardisation test in English and Arithmetic. This test, devised by the Directorate of Selection of Personnel, was administered by a specially selected and trained Indian Air Force clerk. Allotments to

groups were made in accordance with the results of this test. Another decision made at that time was that trade allotment would take place at the Recruits' Training Centre under a similar system.

The above scheme came into operation on 1 November 1944, and an immediate reduction in the training wastage of recruits took place. This wastage remained until the end of the war at an average of just under 10% of intake, as opposed to the peak wastage, reached in the middle of 1944, of nearly 60% of intake.

In November 1943 ceiling requirements of I.A.F. airmen by trades were unknown and demands were made by Air Command, South-East Asia, without a knowledge of ultimate needs. The Recruiting Directorate endeavoured to fulfil these demands in quantity. It produced numbers of unsuitable recruits, many of whom were allocated to trades for which they had insufficient education and no aptitude. Demands were not co-ordinated with the intake capacity of the training organization and this led to a bottle-neck with considerable disorganisation and discomfort, resulting in many very suitable potential recruits refusing to join the I.A.F.

In September 1944 a firm ceiling of requirements was produced by trades and this enabled Air Headquarters for the first time to assess requirements of Indian airmen. It was then found that certain trades were over-recruited, whereas other very vital branches had been overlooked. Advertising and publicity were directed towards ascertained needs. Demand for recruits was coordinated with training intake capacity.

The strength of airmen on 31 August 1945 was :—

Trained	—	22,345
Under technical instruction	—	2,127
In No. 2 R.T.C.	—	2,142

Only a very small proportion of educated young men possessed ready-made officer qualifications. Large numbers offered their services, but only very few were successful in passing the Selection Board tests.

Between 1 January 1942, and 31 August 1945, the demand for General Duty officers was 3,006 and the supply was 1,298—approximately 44%. Demand for Ground Duty Officers during the same period was 1,677, and the supply 856, approximately 51%.

Between 1 January 1942, and 31 August 1945, the Other Rank demand amounted to 74,125 and the supply was 41,324, approximately 56%.

All IAF recruitment, except for followers, was regarded as technical recruitment, and compared with the Army, both demands and supply were small. Failure to meet demands was in part due

to the competition of army and civil employment, and, to a small extent, to the demand of the Royal Indian Navy. The main reason was that the standards demanded by the IAF were high, and recruits possessing them were not forthcoming. The official language of the I.A.F. is English and recruitment was therefore confined to men with a working knowledge of that language. Young volunteers with the necessary qualifications were not available in sufficient numbers, and if elder men possessed them, they showed little willingness to come forward under the terms offered.

A cause of much dissatisfaction was the remusterling and reclassification of a large number of recruits at the Recruits' Training Centres by Initial and Re-Selection Boards. In some months well over 50% of the recruits were remustered to lower trade groups or had their trades within the same group altered. Resultant reductions in rates of pay or changes in types of work appeared to the recruits to be a definite breach of contract. This was, however, unavoidable as the recruiting officers gave the recruits technical trades without ascertaining their fitness for them.

Recruiting publicity was conducted by three separate organisations, the Recruiting Directorate, the Directorate of Public Relations, and the Department of Information and Broadcasting. There was no central authority laying down an all-India policy. The desirability of such an authority was evident.

A notable thing about recruitment to the I.A.F. was that its personnel had been recruited from all walks of life and from all communities. They were not segregated into classes or castes ; all lived together, ate together and worked together. As a result the I.A.F. was evolved as a homogeneous force.

CHAPTER V

TRAINING AND EDUCATION OF THE I.A.F.

TRAINING

Situation After the Outbreak of the War

In September 1939 the I.A.F. consisted of one incomplete squadron with 16 officers and 144 other ranks. But there were no units exclusively for training purposes. The air crew received training in the United Kingdom and the technical personnel had elementary training at the Aircraft Depot, Karachi, this being continued in the squadron under British Non-Commissioned Officers. However, with the decision to expand the I.A.F. to four squadrons, five coastal defence flights and a reserve of 300 qualified pilots and 3,000 technical personnel, the building up of a training organisation became necessary. During 1942 further expansion of the force was planned, providing for 10 I.A.F. squadrons and one anti-aircraft co-operation unit consisting of four flights, and the training of between 2,000 and 3,000 Indian other ranks per month to relieve the strain on British manpower, the ceiling figure of the latter being fixed at 25,000 men. A Directorate of Training at Air Headquarters was now required, and by the end of 1942 the Air Ministry approved the formation of such a Directorate and promised to send to India key personnel, which however did not arrive until April 1943.

Many improvisations had to be adopted but by the end of February 1944 the following units had been trained:

Three fighter reconnaissance squadrons (Hurricanes)

Two ground attack squadrons (Hurricanes)

Two fighter squadrons (Hurricanes)

Two light bomber squadrons (Vengeances)

One anti-aircraft co-operation unit consisting of four flights
(Vengeances and Defiants).

The total personnel trained or under training then was:—

Trained

1,190 officers

11,745 airmen

Under Training

86 officers, 304 officer cadets

10,418 airmen.

Growth of the Training Organisation for Aircrues

Towards the end of 1939, the first flying training school was improvised at Risalpur from a squadron there. It was designed to train at one time thirty-eight pilots and twenty observers for the I.A.F. and R.A.F. Both the initial and advanced training was carried out but this scheme had to be revised as the school was

inadequate to meet the growing needs. The following schools were thereupon formed :—

No. 1 Initial Training Wing (I.T.W.)

For the training of I.A.F. officer cadets in discipline, drill, physical training and elementary ground subjects the No. 1 Initial Training Wing was formed in Lahore. The duration of the course was 10 weeks. The I.T.W. was later transferred to Poona, and the course extended to 14 weeks. A further lengthening of the course to 18 weeks was made towards the end of 1943.

Nos. 1 and 2 Elementary Flying Training Schools (E.F.T.S.)

Located at Begumpet (Hyderabad) and Jodhpur respectively the schools provided elementary flying and ground training for I.A.F. officer cadets and a small number of R.A.F. pilots. The duration of the course was 10 weeks, later extended to 12 weeks.

No. 1 Service Flying Training School (S.F.T.S.)

The school was established at Ambala for intermediate and advanced flying and ground training for I.A.F. pilots and a few R.A.F. pilots. The school was divided into two parts (*a*) the intermediate training squadron, and (*b*) the advanced training squadron, the duration of the courses being 10 and 11 weeks respectively. It also provided training for a limited number of I.A.F. observers. With the formation of an operational training unit at Risalpur in 1942 the intermediate and advanced training squadrons were combined and the duration of the course was reduced to 18 weeks during 1943.

Prior to being sent to I.T.W. an officer cadet pilot was given elementary flying experience at a civil flying school under the control of the Director of Civil Aviation. Thus the sequence of training was :—

Flying experience at a civil flying school

I.T.W. course

E.F.T.S. course

S.F.T.S. course.

After this the pilot was posted to a unit and there completed his operational training. This sequence of training was designed to produce 150 pilots and 50 observers per annum.

Armament training was carried out at Drigh Road, Karachi, where courses were held for pilots and observers, but late in 1941 because of the large increase in the number of reinforcing aircraft passing through Drigh Road the school had to be closed. A new armament training unit was formed at Peshawar, and pilots and observers, after completing the S.F.T.S. Course, were sent there for a three weeks' course before going to a unit. This unit closed down on the formation of the operational training unit.

At the beginning of 1942 civil flying clubs ceased training officer cadets, their planes being used for anti-aircraft co-operation

flying. Henceforth, on their acceptance for the I.A.F., the officer cadets went direct to the initial training wing.

Prior to the entry of Japan into the war, little operational training had been carried out beyond peace-time standards. Early in 1942, however, a fighter operational training unit was formed at Risalpur and a bomber operational training unit at Peshawar.

The Fighter Operational Training

At first the fighter O.T.U. catered both for I.A.F. and R.A.F. personnel. Later it became purely a training school for I.A.F. pilots. As the flow of Hurricanes in this Command improved, conversion courses from Hart and Lysander types of aircraft began, No. 1 I.A.F. Squadron being the first to convert in July 1942. Thenceforth other I.A.F. squadrons converted and regular courses were held for the pilots passing out from No. 1 S.F.T.S. The O.T.U. training consisted of a 12 week conversion course to Hurricanes, including squadron training and gunnery training, and a four weeks' course of fighter reconnaissance training. From the beginning of 1944 replacement pilots for the ground attack squadrons, after three weeks course at the O.T.U. were sent to Ranchi for a three weeks special ground attack course before being posted to the squadrons.

The Bomber Operational Training Unit

This opened early in 1942 with Lysanders, but closed in April pending the arrival of modern aircraft which arrived towards the end of the year. In January 1943 conversion to Vengeance aircraft commenced and two squadrons were converted. Replacement pilots from No. 1 S.F.T.S. for these squadrons carried out a 10 weeks' course before posting. Observers were not required for this type of aircraft and those in the two squadrons were converted to wireless operator air gunner duties. Replacement W. Op/A.Gs were selected from ground personnel, given a 12 weeks' course at No. 1 Air Gunners School, Bhopal, and then posted to the bomber O.T.U. where they were crewed up with the pilots from No. 1 S.F.T.S.

Growth of the Training Organisation for Ground Personnel

On the decision to expand the Indian Air Force, a recruits' training centre (for discipline, drill etc.) and a non-technical training centre were formed at Lahore. For the technical personnel No. 1 School was formed at Ambala for technical training.

A few recruits of the requisite technical standard were recruited direct into the I.A.F., but the majority of the new technical personnel received primary training under the Director of Civil Aviation before enrolment in the I.A.F. Candidates desirous of receiving technical training were interviewed and, if selected, went as civilians to one of the civil technical training centres to receive basic instruction in

the trades for which they were considered suitable. This training varied from 4 to 12 months according to the trade. On the satisfactory completion of this training they were enrolled in the I.A.F. and sent to the recruits' training centre where they were kitted out and underwent a further four weeks' course in discipline, drill, physical training, etc. They then went on to No. 1 School of Technical Training for advanced training in their trades, courses varying in length from 12 to 24 weeks.

Non-technical personnel was received direct and posted to the recruits' training centre, afterwards proceeding to the non-technical training centre for training as clerks, equipment assistants and aircraft hands.

This training organisation remained in force until the beginning of 1943 when it became necessary to increase greatly the capacity of the training centres and to form new ones for the monthly target of 2,750 recruits. At this stage two courses were open :—

- (i) To pass on to the Recruiting Directorate immediately a target figure of recruits required by trades in the hope that, by the time the men were found, a training organisation would be ready for them.
- or, (ii) to await the arrival of key personnel from the U.K. due to arrive in April 1943, and to plan the training organisation in India on the lines of that developed in the U.K. The knowledge and experience of the officers sent out by the Air Ministry would be utilised for this planning before the start of recruiting.

The first course was chosen. Training schools were expanded and new ones formed. By November 1943, twenty-four ground training establishments covering every variety of technical and non-technical trade required by a modern air force were functioning. Had the second course been adopted and all arrangements made and checked for providing accommodation, training staffs, equipment and syllabus etc. before the recruits were enrolled, the standard of training would have been higher. No bottlenecks would have occurred, and there would have been no unsatisfactory conditions at, nor overcrowding of, the schools which in fact occurred through the buildings being occupied before constructional work on them was completed. In that case training would have proceeded far more smoothly, but there would have been no appreciable output of trained personnel until the latter part of 1944. Furthermore, to have closed down recruiting might well have had a permanent adverse effect. As a result of the adoption of the first course a total of 1,190 officers and 11,745 airmen had been trained by the end of February 1944. This greatly relieved the strain on British manpower. The building-up process being completed, the intake of recruits passed smoothly through the training centres. The next stage in

the development of the training organisation was to improve its efficiency and thus to raise the standard of recruits before they were posted to units. This followed after February 1944.

Indian Air Training Corps

To encourage the recruitment of university students for the technical ranks of the I.A.F. a scheme was devised on the lines of the Air Training Corps in the United Kingdom. Briefly, the scheme visualised special classes at the universities on the organisation of air force, the theory of flights, the working of the internal combustion engine, and other technical subjects. Some air force drill and physical training were included.

The first I.A.T.C. units were raised at the Muslim University, Aligarh, in February 1943. From the outset the university authorities were anxious for the scheme to be extended to all the Indian universities, but due to a shortage of equipment and instructors it was possible to extend it only to the Punjab, Allahabad, Osmania, Madras, Travancore, Nagpur and Calcutta Universities in 1943. In the following year, when the equipment and instructional facilities had improved, Bombay University entered the scheme and later it was decided to extend it to the remaining universities. There was also a proposal to give certain public and secondary schools pre-entry training facilities to encourage air-mindedness in the boys.

The training syllabus of the I.A.T.C. was designed for the recruitment of technicians, but it was found that the average university student believed that service in the ranks would involve loss of prestige. Hence very few enrolled themselves for I.A.T.C. courses and subsequent entry into the I.A.F. was disappointing. This and the generally unsatisfactory aircrew situation in the I.A.F. led to a reconsideration of the scheme.

In October 1943 the I.A.T.C. was converted into a pre-entry recruiting organisation for the General Duties Branch. Training was revised to make it more practical. Prospective aircrew candidates received a grounding in service subjects and training to improve their physique and mental alertness. Particular attention was paid to the development of qualities of leadership, reliability, and responsibility. A cadet received a minimum flying training of 3 hours on the aircraft of flying clubs. Courses were made attractive by visits to Air Force stations, factories, telephone exchanges, and other places of interest. Despite these changes, however, the I.A.T.C. continued to fall short of expectations. Vice-Chancellors of the universities were requested to point out the deficiencies of the existing systems. Summarised, these were that the numerous rejections of candidates by Officers Selection Boards did not encourage students to join the I.A.T.C., and that the normal period of 3 months training

was far too short. To improve matters and minimise rejections by the Selection Boards the training syllabus was revised, far greater emphasis being laid on the practical side. Courses were extended to six months ; and to compensate the cadets undergoing training, the universities were requested to include it in the normal curriculum.

The final scheme, operated at all the universities in India, was under the direct administrative control of Air Headquarters. Owing to the long distances and the time spent on rail travel central administration was found to be neither efficient nor expeditious. It was decided, therefore, to form a Northern and Southern I.A.T.C. Area H.Q., one at Allahabad, the other at Madras. These Headquarters consisted of two officers, one non-commissioned officer and three airmen and functioned as Group Headquarters for units allotted to them. The Deputy Commandant of the area was made responsible for training, supervision and efficient administration of the units under his jurisdiction. In addition, he had to maintain close liaison with the Air Force establishment detailed to provide administrative services, the Vice-Chancellors of the universities and other civil organisations in the area. It was anticipated that this reconstruction would go a long way towards making the I.A.T.C. scheme a success.

Training Wastage

Wastage during training was very high. To ascertain the reasons for failure, and to discover methods by which wastage might be reduced, a comprehensive analysis of the cases of the rejected pilots was undertaken in 1943. It was found after a general survey that the reasons for failure might be classified as follows :—

(i) *Physical.* Covering such disabilities as imperfect eyesight, air sickness, short legs, or other general physical defects.

(ii) *Mental.* Included inability to co-ordinate hands to feet, nervous and kindred complaints, inability to learn and a lack of mechanical knowledge.

(iii) *Moral Fibre.*

The percentage of wastage in the schools was as follows :—

I.T.W.	17%
E.F.T.S.	61%
S.F.T.S.	15%
O.T.U.	7%

The percentage of wastage of the rejected pilots examined under the above classification was :—

Physical	28%
Mental	70%
Moral Fibre	2%

Finally, the percentage of wastage under the above classification by schools was :—

	<i>Physical</i>	<i>Mental</i>	<i>Moral Fibre</i>
I.T.W.	6%	94%	0%
E.F.T.S.	31%	63%	2%
S.F.T.S.	24%	74%	2%
O.T.U.	40%	40%	20%

The main cause of failure was a mental incapacity to assimilate knowledge in the early stages and, in addition, inability either to understand or apply the theoretical side of flying. This was chiefly shown in the lack of co-ordination of hands and feet, slow reaction to sudden change in a given set of circumstances, and the absence of a mechanical and practical mind.

In addition, several aspects of training were considered during the course of this enquiry, from which the following conclusions were derived :—

- (i) The upbringing, background, and general environment of the recruit did not readily fit him to become a pilot.
- (ii) The R.A.F. standard of instruction was satisfactory. A study of the personal reports rendered by the chief flying instructors and the chief ground instructors showed that they had a proper understanding of the problems arising in the training of pupils.
- (iii) The length of courses was satisfactory. It was not considered that any flying course was too condensed in time. Some had been lengthened. The R.A.F. standard of instruction had not been lowered, the same standard of instruction being given over a longer period to allow for language difficulties, and the inculcation of new ideas.
- (iv) The type of aircraft used in flying instruction was satisfactory.
- (v) The recruits were not all equally suitable for aircrews.

The higher the wastage the larger the intake required, hence the importance of cutting down wastage was evident. The following action was taken to effect this object.

(i) *General Duties Recruiting Officers' Scheme.*

From October 1943 selected General Duty Officers of the I.A.F. were appointed recruiting officers. They went on recruiting tours, gave lectures, and made personal contacts, working directly under the Deputy Director of Recruiting (Air), and in conjunction with the Officers' Selection Board. The scheme showed promise and there was an increase in the number of applicants.

(ii) The role of the Indian Air Training Corps was altered to that of the pre-entry training for aircrews.

(iii) *Officers' Selection Board.* No. 7 began to function in April 1944, primarily for Air Force candidates. Mechanical aptitude was the basis of a high percentage of the selection tests.

Factors Affecting Training

The main difficulties encountered in the training of the personnel for the Indian Air Force were those of language, the lack of mechanical aptitude of the average recruit and his timidity in accepting responsibility, the falling off in the standard of recruits, climatic conditions and the provision of the necessary instructors and training equipment.

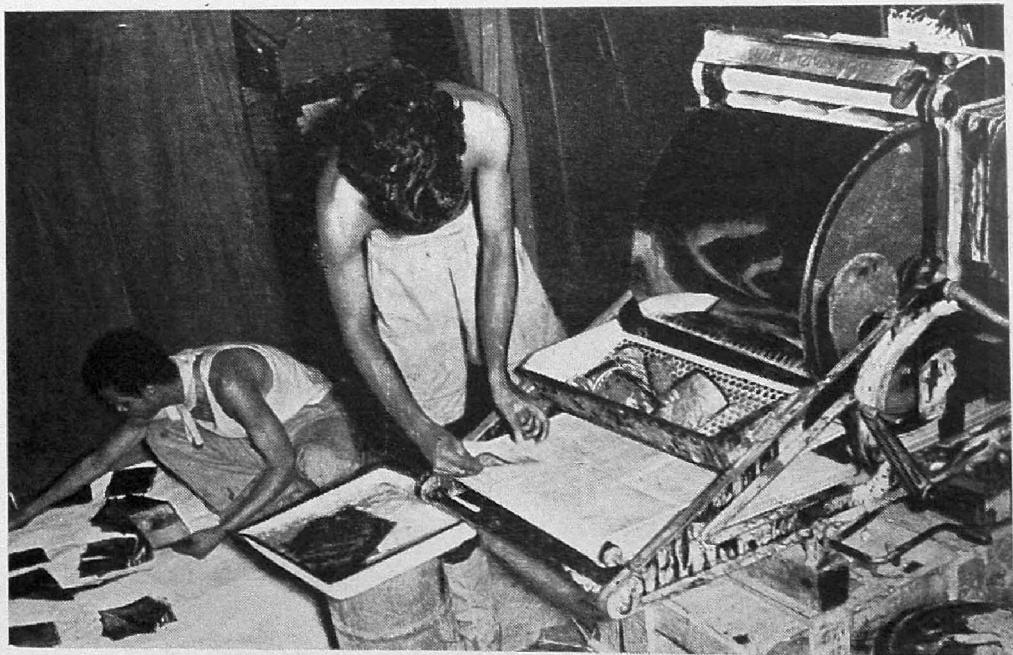
The language difficulty was a very real one as even well-educated recruits did not readily understand the technical terms and the peculiar idioms. This considerably complicated the instruction in flying particularly as most recruits lacked a mechanical background and so could not readily grasp the principles of aeroplane engines and flying. In addition, the heat of the summer months and air turbulence made flying training possible only in the mornings and evenings. Hence it was necessary to lengthen the flying training courses. In the training of the ground personnel the language difficulty was an even greater handicap and much of the early training of recruits was limited to educational subjects.

In the early development of the training organisation the provision of suitable instructors, who had all to be found from the R.A.F. units in India, was very difficult. Only limited numbers were available. Efforts were made to train I.A.F. airmen as instructors but very few were deemed to be suitable. By 1944 less than 10% of the instructors required had been obtained from the I.A.F. The provision of experienced technical Non-Commissioned Officers for the I.A.F. squadrons was another problem. To train I.A.F. mechanics to the degree of efficiency for senior N.C.Os posts in the squadrons was difficult to achieve in a short time. In 1944 all I.A.F. squadrons still had a small cadre of R.A.F. technical personnel.

Wastage during training was extremely high, but the overall principle of adhering to the Royal Air Force standards of training was continued. It was sought to improve the standard of recruits by raising the rates of pay and by pressing for improved methods of selection. Unsuitable trainees were rejected at the earliest possible stage of technical training, but those who appeared to have a chance of reaching the required standard were given extra training. This involved a highly organised system of reports, records, and progressing at schools. The length of the majority of the courses was therefore increased.

To maintain a good standard of technical training it was necessary to continue this in the units. Thus, in January 1944 a Signals Staff Instruction was issued on the subject and units were

**Wg. Cdr. (later Air Marshal)
A.M. Engineer D.F.C.**



Mobile photo processing unit where aerial pictures that give clue to enemy moves are printed



Technical personnel of No. 1 Squadron which went to Burma

required to submit monthly returns detailing the signals training carried out for signals and aircrew personnel. The improvement achieved by this was reflected in the success of the candidates at the Trade Test Boards.

Physical Fitness

Supervision of physical training and drill and training of instructors was the responsibility of Air Headquarters, India, up to 1943 and was then taken over by Air Command, South-East Asia. This duty was later performed by Base Air Forces South-East Asia when Air Command South-East Asia moved to Kandy.

The importance of physical fitness and recreation was realised and recruitment of I.A.F. Physical Training Instructors was started late in 1942. In 1943, the Inspector of Physical Fitness, Air Ministry, toured India to explore the scope of physical fitness training and recreation. At the beginning of 1944, a Command Physical Fitness Officer (P.F.O.) was established on the Ground Training Section of Headquarters, A.C.S.E.A. Physical Fitness Officers were also established at Group Headquarters and many large units, and this aspect of training began to receive full attention of the specialist officers. The following matters of policy were dealt with :

- (i) Co-ordinated syllabi and time tables were introduced for all stages of air crew, recruits and ground training. In June 1944 the syllabus for Physical Training Instructors' initial training was revised.
- (ii) *Equipment* : Scales of equipment for gymnastic apparatus were revised on the basis of scales in force in England.
- (iii) *Personnel* :
 - (a) Control was established over the posting of Physical Fitness Officers and Physical Training Instructors through 'P' Staff and Base Personnel I.A.F. Records Office respectively.
 - (b) Policy letters were issued safeguarding personnel from mis-employment.
 - (c) Group and unit commanders were advised of the nature and scope of duties of Physical Fitness Officers and Physical Training Instructors.
- (iv) *Recruitment* : It was found that suitable recruits were not attracted to the trade of P.T.I. (Group V). Therefore, in December 1944, a new trade of "Physical Fitness and Drill Instructors" (Group III) was introduced.
- (v) *P.T. Schools* : This school was established at the Initial Training Wing, Lahore, towards the end of 1942. It was moved to N.T.T.O. Secunderabad early in 1943, where all non-technical training was centralised. The

following courses were conducted at the school :—

- (a) Initial training courses for I.A.F. Physical Training Instructors from December 1942. Duration 8 weeks.
- (b) Refresher courses for R.A.F. Physical Training Instructors from October 1944. Duration 4 weeks.
- (c) Refresher courses for P.F.Os in November and December 1944. Duration 2 weeks.

In June 1945, physical fitness was separated from the ground training section and was established as a separate branch of the administrative service.

EDUCATION

Concurrently with the formation of the I.A.F. in 1932 an Indian Assistant (later to be designated I.A.F. Education Officer) was appointed to the R.A.F. Education Officer at the Aircraft Depot R.A.F., Drigh Road. Education was then mainly limited to the teaching of theory connected with trade training, mechanical training, English and elementary calculations for all trades. Apprentices not qualifying at a passing-out education test were discharged although later those evincing outstanding technical ability in their trade tests were retained. Educational tests for reclassification to L.A.C. and promotion to the rank of sergeant were introduced in 1933. These tests were suspended in the R.A.F. for the duration of the war; but were continued in the I.A.F. to maintain a high level in the growing force. Based on R.A.F. standards these showed a very satisfactory state of affairs between 1939 and 1944, passes in the L.A.C. test always exceeding 60%.

In 1939 the I.A.F. Apprentice Training School was transferred to No. 1 School of Air Force Technical Training (India) at Ambala where education was carried out by two R.A.F. Education Officers and one I.A.F. Education Officer. By 1941 the establishment of I.A.F. Education Officers had risen to 6, the R.A.F. Officers then being posted elsewhere. As the number of I.A.F. Officers increased the Education Branch continued to grow, honours graduates were recruited for it, and warrant officers and senior non-commissioned education instructors were introduced in 1943.

With the increase in numbers the standard of recruits became progressively lower. Hence greater attention had to be given to the teaching of English and elementary calculations. At the end of 1944 the time allowed for educational training at the recruits' training centres was 11 hours per week for the first 8 weeks, and 6 hours per week for the last 4 weeks. At the schools of technical training the time allowed was 4 hours a week, 2 hours of this being trade educational training covering subjects directly connected with the trade concerned. Where members of the educational staff had the requisite trade qualifications they gave this instruction ; otherwise

it was given by the trade instructors. The remaining educational time was given for English and elementary calculations, with an additional hour per week for discussion groups.

The difficulties encountered were due mainly to the rapid expansion and the consequent dearth of educational staff. Recruitment for this was slow since it was not easy to find men with the necessary technical qualifications. Even non-technical candidates having the requisite academic qualifications and otherwise satisfying the service requirements were available only in small numbers. At the end of the period reviewed, the personnel situation in the Educational Branch was :—

<i>Officers</i>		<i>W.Os and N.C.Os</i>	
Establishment	68	Establishment	194
Strength	49	Strength	126

(Please see Appendix 'C')

CHAPTER VI

AIR FORCE WELFARE

1939-1940

The start of the war found the Royal Air Force and the Indian Air Force quartered in stations of North-West India, fully provided with excellent sports grounds, old-established and well-furnished institutes and libraries, and excellent accommodation. The canteens, supper bars, and institutes of these stations were well stocked with all varieties of goods normally required by airmen, and well furnished and maintained by members of the Canteen Contractors' Syndicate. Mails were received regularly, and the peace-time scale of rations, with the extra messing allowance of six annas per diem for British airmen and two annas per diem for Indian airmen enabled satisfactory meals to be served.

Until July 1942, such administration and co-ordination of welfare as was beyond the province of the Station Commanders was the duty of the Administrative Officer at Air Headquarters, India, to provide.

1941-1942

As from 20 June 1942, the Canteen Contractors' Syndicate went into abeyance for the duration of the war. Its business was carried on by the Canteen Services (India). There were many reasons for the change which was unavoidable, but a period had to elapse before the Canteen Directorate could train personnel and set up an organisation to ensure a regular flow of supplies to the forward areas.

Early in 1942 the decision was taken to set up a separate welfare organisation for the air forces and in May 1942 the establishment of a Wing Commander, R.A.F. Welfare Officer was sanctioned. The post remained vacant until 12 July 1942, when a civilian with twenty years of welfare work to his credit among European and Indian employees of the Burmah Oil Company was appointed. This Welfare Officer was a part of Personnel Staff and known as "P. 5".

In August 1942, two Air Force Instructions were published describing the constitution of the Amenities, Comforts and Entertainments for the Services (A.C.E.S.) Funds. One established a fund for the benefit of the airmen of the Indian Air Force, which catered for the welfare of Indian airmen, including enrolled followers, serving in India as well as overseas. The credits to the Fund in respect of Indian airmen and enrolled followers were Rs. 5/-, per head based

on the number of Indian airmen and enrolled followers on the strength of the Air Force in India as on 1 July 1942. Provision was made for a supplementary credit if on 1 October 1942 the strength was greater than on 1 July 1942. Provision was also made for a further grant of Rs. 10/- for every Indian airman or enrolled follower proceeding overseas, excluding Ceylon. The other Instruction established the Amenities, Comforts and Entertainments for the Services (A.C.E.S.) Fund for the benefit of British airmen in India. Credits to the Fund for the year 1942/43 were Rs. 6/- per capita, based on the number of airmen on the strength of the India Command as on 1 July 1942. A supplementary credit was also given on 1 October 1942, due to the increase in the strength of airmen of the Command on 1 October 1942.

The purpose of these Funds was to finance the following amenities :—

- (i) Sports gear and indoor games;
- (ii) Wireless sets and batteries, gramophones and records, musical instruments ;
- (iii) Special projects, such as literature, institutes, clubs, airmen's homes and entertainments ;
- (iv) Anything which helps in the well being and morale of the airman, which is not supplied by the Government, and which the airman himself cannot provide.

From both the A.C.E.S. Funds for Indian and British airmen, grants were made to Group Commanders and officers commanding independent units, of Rs. 3/- per capita, to meet expenditure on objects (i), (ii) and (iii) mentioned above. The remainder of the Fund was held in reserve at the Air Headquarters. Grants from the Reserve were only made for stations and units in special need of assistance as directed by the Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief. Applications for grants from the Reserve were considered by an Air Force committee comprising the Deputy Air Officer in charge of Administration, Deputy Financial Adviser, Air Forces, and Senior Welfare Staff Officer.

The Government of India sanctioned a grant of Rs. 6/- per capita based on the strength of airmen of the Royal Air Force and the Indian Air Force in Ceylon, to purchase amenities for airmen in Ceylon in the same manner as the A.C.E.S. Fund provided for their fellow airmen stationed in India.

In August 1942, Air Commodore Peake, Director of Air Force Welfare, Air Ministry, came to advise on air force welfare in India. On his advice the Welfare Branch of Personnel Staff, or "P. 5" was accorded the status of a Deputy Directorate with a Wing Commander as the Deputy Director of Air Force Welfare, responsible to Air Officer in charge of Administration, Air Headquarters, India, through his Deputy.

The following establishment was sanctioned :

- | | |
|-------------------|---|
| W/Cdr. (A & S.D.) | — Deputy Director of Air Force Welfare. |
| AFW. 1. 1 S/Ldr. | — To act when Deputy Director of Air Force Welfare is away. Liaison with Groups and Stations. Bulk purchases etc. |
| 1 F/O. | |
| AFW. 2. 1 F/Lt. | — Individual welfare, hardship cases, etc. |
| AFW. 3. 1 F/Lt. | — Entertainment in all its forms. |

The responsibility for liaison between Air Headquarters, and Canteen Services, was placed on the Deputy Director of Air Force Welfare, and a Flight-Lieutenant was appointed as R.A.F. Canteen Liaison Officer. AFW. 5, with one F/Lt. I.A.F. was also established in September 1942, to look after the welfare of the Indian airmen and enrolled non-combatants. At the same time, Welfare Co-ordination Officers were appointed at Groups, but it was not possible to find sufficient officers to fill all these vacancies until the end of the year. I.A.F. Welfare Officers were also added early in 1943 to cater for the needs of a growing Indian Air Force.

It was desirable that the welfare organisation to be set up should not, in any way, affect the responsibility of the commanding officers for the welfare of airmen under their command. The welfare organisation set up was divided into two parts—unit welfare, and the Director of Air Force Welfare, India, (later to be known as Welfare Staff) administering, inspiring and promoting welfare activities through Welfare Co-ordinating Officers at Group and Base Headquarters.

The policy of Air Force Welfare in India was to establish welfare co-ordinating committees at every air force unit. The committee was to co-ordinate all forms of welfare activities in the unit and therefore was made fully representative. The best person was selected to organise each specific welfare activity regardless of rank. In every unit with Indian airmen or followers an officer was appointed to look after their welfare.

On 3 October 1942, the Railway Board, agreed to extend the concession for free rail conveyance for articles belonging to the Amenities, Comforts and Entertainments for the Services Fund to include articles belonging to the above Fund when despatched for use by Royal Air Force and Indian Air Force personnel.¹ A ruling was also obtained from the Central Woollen Comforts Committee, India, that the woollen garments supplied to the Air Force would be distributed equally between the R.A.F. and I.A.F. personnel. Instructions to that effect were then issued to all Groups and lower formations.

By the end of 1942 Welfare Officers had been appointed at each Group Headquarters and the distribution of sports gear and indoor games purchased with A.C.E.S.Funds well organised.

¹ Letter No. 9026-TX.

The rapid expansion of the Royal and Indian Air Force necessitated the formation of a large number of new units which needed assistance for providing amenities for their airmen. A policy letter was issued to all units having I.A.F. personnel to impress upon them the necessity of according similar treatment to I.A.F. personnel as was accorded to the R.A.F. The number of complaints received from I.A.F. personnel serving in R.A.F. units about the behaviour of their R.A.F. contemporaries, due mainly to their ignorance of the Indian temperament and the status of Indian personnel, necessitated the issue of the above circular letter. Although this did not have the desired effect absolutely, it certainly went a long way to ameliorate the position of the Indian personnel and also served to bring about, to a certain extent, a feeling of comradeship between the two sets of people serving in the same units.

1943-44

The grant of Rs. 6/- per head was renewed for the financial year 1943-1944 for British airmen, and Rs. 5/- per head for Indian airmen and enrolled followers. On the analogy of the R.A.F. an I.A.F. Comforts Fund was also started. The income of this fund was derived from voluntary contributions and its purpose was to provide comforts and amenities to the I.A.F. personnel.

Every R.A.F. and I.A.F. unit received its quota of sports gear and games equipment. Books were purchased from England and India and by August 1943 there were sufficient books in the unit libraries to provide one book for every two British airmen throughout the Command. Orders were placed for English books for Indian airmen.

Entertainment in all its forms was much expanded during 1943. Units were encouraged to start their own bands and funds were made available with which musical instruments were purchased to enable 50 unit bands to be formed. Musical instruments and make-up sets and dresses etc. were also supplied from the welfare funds to the Indian airmen for forming their own local concert parties at their own units.

In September 1943, His Excellency the Viceroy authorised a grant of Rs. 1,50,000/- from his War Purposes Fund for the provision of hostel and recreational facilities and of subsidised hostel accommodation in cities for officers of the Royal Air Force and Indian Air Force.

The A.C.E.S. grant of Rs. 4/12/- and Rs. 4/4/- per capita for British airmen and Indian airmen respectively, was authorised for the financial year 1944-1945.

With the formation of Air Command, South-East Asia, in 1943, a post of a Squadron Leader I.A.F. Welfare was created at Air Headquarters, India, and was filled in December 1943. This

officer was to act as the Command Welfare Officer, A.H.Q. and was to work in close liaison with S.W.S.O., A.C.S.E.A. Another Flight Lieutenant I.A.F. was also added to the A.H.Q. establishment to assist the Command Welfare Officer. From now onwards A.H.Q. was to administer the funds and look after the welfare of all the I.A.F. units in India Command and the R.A.F. personnel serving in that Command. I.A.F. personnel serving in A.C.S.E.A. was no longer the responsibility of India Command, although A.C.E.S. grant in respect of this personnel was to be drawn from the Government of India and handed to A.C.S.E.A. for administration.

An improved scale of rations was sanctioned in January 1944 for Indian airmen both in peace and field areas, but the demand for efficient cooks to make the most of the new rations was still great. A case was put up to the financial authorities for the sanction of the same trade pay to the Cooks I.T. as to the Cooks B.T. but it could not be got through.

The Government of India sanctioned Rs. 24 lacs for "Live." entertainments for Indian Services in India and overseas, and the establishment of Fauji Dilkhush Sabha in April 1944 for providing free entertainments to all the three arms of the Services. Units were encouraged to provide their own entertainments and grants were made from the A.C.E.S. Indian Airmen Reserve Fund to three I.A.F. squadrons to form orchestras for their unit concert parties. Arrangements were also made to provide entertainment films to the units having 16-mm. projector. In view of the conditions prevalent in the field service areas, it was considered necessary to provide at least four radio sets and a non-technical library to each I.A.F. squadron. Battery radio sets were provided free of cost. As units did not possess sufficient funds to maintain libraries, books to the value of Rs. 8,000 were procured from the Forces Book Club, London, and distributed to the units in India Command. These were in addition to the 1,260 Penguin books supplied to I.A.F. units. 170 gramophones were bought from the Gramophone Company, Dum Dum, in March 1944 and distributed to R.A.F. and I.A.F. personnel in India Command and A.C.S.E.A.

A sum of Rs. 2,666/9/- representing the I.A.F. share of the canteen profits from the date the Canteen Contractors' Syndicate handed over the canteens to the Canteens Service in India to 31 March 1943, was received. The sum was used to start a Canteen Profits Fund to be utilised for improving conditions in messes and institutes for which an adequate provision was not made by the Government or the canteen contractors. A donation of Rs. 30,000 was received in March 1944, from the Raja of Khandpara State which was used to form the Khandpara State Trust Fund. The capital of this fund was not to be spent but the interest accruing from its investment would be used to improve the amenities enjoyed by the Indian

airmen and enrolled non-combatants and for doing all such acts which were conducive to their welfare. This fund was administered by a Board of Trustees consisting of A.O. A. (president), S.P.S.O. & Command Welfare Officer.

A need was also felt to open an I.A.F. maternity and child welfare clinic at Ambala, in addition to the one existing at Lahore. A grant of Rs. 1,000 was accordingly obtained for this purpose from the Indian Army Maternity and Child Welfare Fund and a clinic was opened in May 1944. The Government of India also sanctioned Rs. 2,000 for these clinics for the year 1944-45.

In June 1944, two gifts of Rs. 1,00,000 each were received from H.E. the Viceroy's War Purposes Fund for both the R.A.F. and I.A.F. in India Command and A.C.S.E.A. One of these donations was to be used in assisting officers' messes and the other to be utilised to assist airmen's clubs etc.

A conference of all the I.A.F. welfare officers, serving in A.C.S.E.A. and India was called at Simla in May 1944. Various welfare problems were discussed and the welfare officers were given a good briefing for achieving maximum efficiency in their work.

1945

The 1945-46 allotment from A.C.E.S. Fund amounted to Rs. 2,58,261/14/- for Indian airmen and enrolled followers and Rs. 13,701/3/- for British airmen. Out of this allotment a sum of Rs. 1,22,550/- was handed over to A.C.S.E.A. for welfare of Indian airmen serving in that command.

The Indian Army Maternity and Child Welfare Committee was redesignated as the Indian Forces Families Maternity and Child Welfare Committee and the Command Welfare Officer was nominated as A.H.Q.'s representative on this committee. The annual contribution of Rs. 2,000 to the Maternity and Child Welfare Fund was increased to Rs. 5,000 for 1945-46 and a third I.A.F. clinic was opened at Drigh Road to meet the requirements of over 2,500 I.A.F. personnel in that area.

An I.A.F. officer was also posted to Fauji Dilkhush Sabha organisation to represent A.H.Q. and to take up the work of raising separate parties for the I.A.F. These parties definitely provided a better standard of entertainment and were quite successful.

Four I.A.F. posts were established for duty with the Civil Liaison Organisation, Welfare General's Branch, G.H.Q. with their headquarters at Bangalore, Calcutta, Lahore and Lucknow respectively. These officers were charged with the specific duty of looking after the welfare of the families of I.A.F. personnel and also to see that D.S.S.A.Bs. and the A.C.L.Os and C.L.Os did not overlook the I.A.F. These officers did a good job of work both for the I.A.F. airmen and their families.

H.Q. BAFSEA started raising I.A.F. concert parties from talent available in the Command and the first party which made its first tour of Northern India proved very successful. From the reports received from the units visited by this party, the standard of entertainment provided was above average.

The end of the war found the I.A.F. in a much better condition with regard to welfare than in the dark days of 1942 and 1943. Almost all the units had their libraries, sports gear, and indoor games etc. Live entertainment and cinemas were also available. Canteens services had much improved, clubs and institutes had been organised for both the R.A.F. and the I.A.F. at big stations and were very popular with the airmen. Private hospitality by philanthropic civilians was also provided.

CHAPTER VII

SOME OTHER SERVICES

Intelligence

The provision and maintenance of an adequate Intelligence branch for the I.A.F. was a difficult problem. It was the policy of the Government of India that an I.A.F. officer should fill the Intelligence post on each of the I.A.F. squadrons. In addition certain Intelligence establishments on higher formations were allocated for I.A.F. officers and a few trained Intelligence officers were taken from A.C.S.E.A. to fill these posts. But some of these fell sick, or were promoted into vacancies carrying higher rank or proved unsatisfactory as Intelligence officers. To replace them it was necessary to take officers from other branches with no Intelligence experience whatsoever ; since very soon after the split between A.C.S.E.A. and Air HQ the only school in India for the training of the Air Force Intelligence Officers was closed down, and the only way in which these officers could be trained was by attaching them as understudies to good squadron I.Os for a period of two or three months to learn their job. In view of the small number of officers requiring to be trained—never more than one or two at a time—it was quite impracticable for this HQ to run a special school for instructing them. But this arrangement was not satisfactory from the point of view of the service and it was not fair for the officers either who generally lacked the initiative and self-confidence to teach themselves ; but it was the inevitable result of the extreme smallness of the Intelligence branch of the I.A.F. Another unfortunate thing was the lack of opportunity in the Intelligence branch, since the number of posts of F/Lt and upwards to which I.A.F. squadron I.Os could be posted was less than the number of F/O posts and once these were filled promotion was blocked. This was undoubtedly hard on the squadron I.Os, some of whom had served satisfactorily for a considerable time and saw their juniors promoted over their heads ; this naturally led to a certain amount of discontent. The only remedy was the frequent transfer of officers between branches, but owing to the impracticability mentioned above of securing an Intelligence school for such small numbers it was not feasible in war time.

Another difficulty that confronted the section was the lack of adequate historical records of air operations on the N.W. Frontier in the past. It appeared from such records as were discovered that the narratives of N.W. Frontier operations before the war, air as well as military, had been compiled by the General Staff Branch and were lacking in the detailed information necessary for any lessons to

be learned about the best use of air forces for this work. Care was therefore taken to ensure, from the time this section was formed, that adequate historical records of air operations were compiled giving all the technical details which a future A.O.C. would require.

Legal Organisation

With the expansion and growth of the I.A.F. under the impact of the war, it became necessary to organise and ultimately create a department responsible for the efficient dispensation of law. The Indian Air Force Act and Regulations which were amended from time to time to meet the needs of the Service as occasion arose, formed the basis of the law to which air force personnel was subject. It was however, dispensed by the Army Staff of the Judge Advocate General, who was entrusted with its interpretation and to whom air force cases were invariably referred for adjudication. This practice could not continue much longer as the volume of legal work grew rapidly. It was therefore decided, in the first instance, to establish a legal branch of the R.A.F. in India. This branch was designed to co-operate with the J.A.G. in Air Force Legal work and in August 1942 the Government of India sanctioned an establishment for this branch.

The Legal Branch was thus established but it was found difficult to obtain R.A.F. officers with the necessary qualifications. Hence it was agreed that some officers of the Administrative and Special Duties branch with legal qualifications would be transferred to this branch and trained for these specialist duties by a period of attachment to the various offices of the Deputy Judge Advocate General in Army Commands. This system worked satisfactorily for a time during the War, but it was felt that a self-contained Indian Air Force must have a legal branch wholly its own. There was no lack of legal talent in the expanded IAF and officers selected from the A & SD branch after having gained experience of legal work proved their ability in this line and some of them were absorbed in the new establishment.

In April 1946 the Government of India sanctioned a permanent establishment for the legal branch of the IAF. It consisted of one wing commander (AJAG) and three squadron leaders (DAJAG) who formed part of the existing Judge Advocate General's department.

Court martial work of both the RAF and RIAF steadily increased during the War. Figures showing the number of trials held during 1939-1945 are given in Appendices D & E.

Maintenance

To ensure a maximum operational serviceability and to eliminate the possibility of failure in flight, every aircraft is subject to a series of progressively more detailed technical inspections throughout its flying life. The process of inspections and technical servicing,

together with the provision of necessary spares to enable these to be carried out, is called "maintenance". Maintenance is undertaken by operational squadrons or other user units, e.g., a flying training school, or base repair units, according to the degree of work involved. The whole of maintenance is divided into four degrees or 'lines' and the work undertaken is as follows:—

First line	—In between flight inspections. Daily inspection.	} By squadron or unit.
Second line	—All minor inspections. First major inspections.	
Third line	—Repair after damage or accident.	} By user unit or Base Repair Depot, according to the degree of damage.
Fourth line	—Overhaul, major repair or major modification.	
		} By Base Repair Depot.

Maintenance by Squadron or User Unit

Personnel is provided on the establishment of squadrons or units to undertake the tasks of maintenance. Responsibility for the work carried out rests with the engineer officer of the unit or station.

Maintenance by Base Repair Depots

In addition to fourth line maintenance of aircraft, Base Repair Depots undertake the repair and overhaul of all miscellaneous equipment carried in aircraft, e.g., engines, radio, instruments, armaments etc.

At the outbreak of World War II and in the early days of the war, there existed only the nucleus of an Indian Air Force. Practically the whole of the administrative work and all the maintenance work of this force were done by members of the R.A.F. It was not necessary, nor would it have been practicable to have operated a separate administrative and maintenance organisation. As the war progressed all effort was, of necessity, bent towards the creation of operational squadrons. No steps could be taken to build up a separate maintenance organisation as it would have involved a considerable diversion of effort from the immediate objective of fighting the enemy. Moreover, there were no training establishments at which necessary personnel might be trained for manning such an organisation. The administration and maintenance of the increasing Indian Air Force therefore continued to be undertaken by the R.A.F. maintenance and administrative organisation.

However, to meet the ever-increasing demands on the R.A.F. maintenance organisation, Indian airmen were recruited and trained

in many technical and non-technical trades. Due to the limited number of training establishments and other facilities available, and the limited time in which they could be trained, it was not possible to train the personnel up to the high standard of R.A.F. training. Because of this and because they lacked experience, these airmen were not capable of manning entire units unaided. They were, therefore, employed under the supervision of the R.A.F., in units of Air Command, South-East Asia, as substitutes for British personnel in semi-skilled and unskilled trades. These tradesmen did excellent work with their respective units during the War, and at the same time gained valuable experience of a practical nature. But there was lack of Indian personnel in the highest trades of the Service. With a view to establish a basis for the I.A.F. maintenance organisation fourteen units were specially selected in January 1944 when the policy was to increase the number of Indian airmen in N.C.O. posts to the maximum degree commensurate with efficiency.

Subsequently considerable progress was achieved in manning these units by Indian airmen as the figures below will show:—

Rank	As on 31 December 1944		As on June 1945	
	Establish- ment	Strength	Establish- ment	Strength
W/O	11	5	8	10
F/Sgt.	27	14	19	16
Sgt.	141	22	116	67
Cpl.	253	27	342	85

This progress was, however, not in keeping with the needs of the expanded I.A.F. The number of Indian airmen in the highest trades was small and there was a marked deficiency of experienced non-commissioned officers. At the end of the war the number of skilled tradesmen in the service was barely sufficient for maintaining a maximum of three squadrons.

Meteorology

The meteorological needs of the air force in India before the war were met by the meteorological department of the Government of India. A scheme for expanding the meteorological facilities was initiated in May 1940 by the Air Headquarters. The Director General of Observatories in consultation with Air HQ. prepared a note outlining the organisation necessary to meet the needs of an increasing air force. The note envisaged, among other things, immediate establishment of a Meteorology Volunteer Reserve Corps in the RAF or IAF for a rapid manning of the service meteorology units as soon as they were formed. No action was however taken to implement the scheme in the absence of Government sanction.

The situation that arose on the declaration of war with Japan in December 1941 was that firstly there was no reserve of trained staff to meet the increased demands, and secondly the demands, that began pouring in within two or three weeks of the outbreak of hostilities, were both more immediate and more extensive than had been contemplated in the expansion plan of 1940. The meteorological organisation in India before the war—as far as the service to aviation is concerned—was designed only to meet the requirements of a few aircraft, flying on two or three established routes. No development of the airway meteorological organisation had taken place between the outbreak of war in September 1939 and the beginning of the hostilities with Japan in December 1941. The I.A.F.V.R. (met) contemplated and agreed to in the 1940 plans had not been formed and there was no service personnel available for the meteorological stations required in field service areas. Consequently, civil meteorological staff had to start and maintain for about a year forecast centres for which service personnel would have been more suited.

The entry of Japan into the war lent an urgency to the question of expansion which could not be disregarded. A new I.A.F. Meteorological Branch was formed between August and October 1942. A Meteorological Committee was formed under the chairmanship of DGO to coordinate the meteorological duties of the RAF, IAF and Meteorological Department. In accordance with an agreement reached in July 1942 the D.G.O. recruited and trained men for the I.A.F. Meteorological Branch.

On 1 June 1943 the following staff was recruited to the I.A.F.¹ Assistant Meteorologists-11, Professional Assistants-6, Meteorological Assistants-6, Senior Observers-10, Observers-11, Balloon Makers-2, Total-46.

These 46 men joined in the ranks shown below :—

Civil grade

P.O.	—16 Asst. Met. and Prof. Asst.
W/O.	— 5 Prof. Asst. & Met. Asst.
Fl/Sgt.	— 3 Met. Asst. & Senior Observer.
Sgt.	—10 Senior Observer.
Corpl.	— 1 Observer.
L.A.C.	— 9 Observer.
A.C.	— 2 Balloon Maker.

Some of these had passed out of the military discipline training course and were posted to Air Force stations, others were under training. With these men, Air HQ commenced the programme of opening meteorological stations with service personnel. The Meteorological Department supplied ciphers, publications, normals and blank

1. Report from D.G.O. to Secy. Dept. of Posts and Air, New Delhi, dated 11 June 1943.

charts to the new I.A.F. meteorological stations. Gradually, as service personnel became available A.H.Q. opened new forecast centres in accordance with the expansion plan and also took over some centres that had been opened at an earlier date and been manned temporarily by civilian personnel.

The table below² shows the men who joined the I.A.F. (Met. Branch) either from permanent posts in the Indian Meteorological Dept. or after completing their meteorological training in that Department in temporary posts.

		On 30 September 1944.
Fl/Lt.	1	W/O
F/O	1	F/Sgt.
P/O	22	Sgt.
Cadets	1	Cpl.
	25	L/A/C
		A/C 2(V)
		61

CHAPTER VIII

THE INITIATION

During the War Indian pilots first saw action during the Battle of Britain. In Britain's hour of need twenty-four Indian pilots were sent in September 1940 to England for service with the British pilots engaged in the defence of Britain. They had just been commissioned but most of them had experience of flying as civil pilots before they joined the Indian Air Force. In Britain they passed through a course in the Elementary Flying Training School and then twelve of them were sent for further training on fighters and twelve on bombers. Out of those under training on fighters, six were eventually posted to operational squadrons, three to No. 32 Squadron R.A.F. engaged on coastal patrol work and three to No. 43 Squadron R.A.F. operating on fighter sweeps over occupied France and escorting bombers on daylight attacks on war installations along the French coasts. Two Indian pilots were killed in these operations, the remaining four fighter pilots returned to India in February 1942.

Of the twelve under training on bombers, eight passed the course and were posted to Bomber and Coastal Command Squadrons. Two men were posted to a Whitley Squadron and both were killed in the operations. Two were attached to the Coastal Command. One of them was eventually posted to a Catalina Squadron which came out to South-East Asia. He was lost when the aircraft in which he was serving as a crew failed to return from a patrol near Singapore. Five were posted to Wellington Squadrons. Two of these were killed in the operations. A third made twenty-two operational flights over Germany and the German-occupied territory as a second pilot. Two pilots became the captains of big bombers—one in a Lancaster and another in a Sterling. Three more joined a Wellington Squadron after a period in an Air Gunnery School. By July 1942 the surviving bomber pilots returned to India. Of the 24 pilots who had left India in 1940, eight were killed in the operations.

In May 1942 another batch of 25 was sent to Britain to be trained as pilots. They did not take any part in the air operations in Europe but returned to join I.A.F. squadrons in India. In May 1943 the first batch of 24 trainees went to Canada under the Empire Air Training scheme to be trained as pilots. It was proposed that after their training the pilots would gain operational experience in Fighter Command in England. The object of the scheme was to ensure that adequate reserves of fully trained pilots, with operational experience, were available to meet the demands of the I.A.F. Out of this first batch, six completed the course and were then sent to the United

Kingdom for operational training where they were commissioned. One returned to India before completing the course. Of the rest fourteen were commissioned and three were appointed officer cadets on their return to India but the cadetship of the latter and the commissions of six of the former were terminated before long. In November 1943, a further batch of fifteen went to Canada for training. One returned before the course was over and one was killed whilst undergoing training. The remaining thirteen passed the course and went to the United Kingdom for operational experience.

Thirty-four pilots and technicians were sent to England in 1943 and among the contingent were young pilots who were later absorbed in the Fighter Command of the R.A.F. The batch also included a few technicians who went for advanced training at some of the most important Technical Command Schools in Britain.¹ In 1944 and 1945 the number of officers proceeding to the United Kingdom for training was twelve and two respectively and all of them completed their training successfully. Altogether 37 officers were sent to Britain, at various times during the War for technical training in such subjects as radar, photography, signals, armament and engineering.

Coast Defence

In India one of the essential early tasks was coastal defence. The coast defence flights, which had been formed in October 1940, were entrusted with the task of looking after 3,000 miles of India's coastline with its important harbours. They took over from the scattered detachments of No. 60 Blenheim Squadron R.A.F. which had been doing this work for nearly a year. The flights were to carry out general reconnaissance from their respective stations. The Wapitis with a speed of 100 miles per hour and a range of 500 miles and the Atlantas with a cruising speed of 105 miles per hour compared very unfavourably with the land-based aeroplanes which were doing general reconnaissance work in England about this period ; the Hudsons, for example, had a maximum speed of 248 miles per hour and a range of 1,700 miles at a cruising speed of 170 miles per hour.² But Wapitis, four-engined D.H. 86's or Atlantas were all that were available and the flights were to make the best use of them.

During the short period of their existence (two years) the flights did much valuable work. They shepherded the ships entering and leaving the ports. Their anti-submarine patrols and protection of convoys were an important contribution to the defence of India. True, they had little striking power but even the sight of these obsolete aircraft with their worn-out engines and two 250-lb. bombs gave com-

1. *India's Part in the Fourth Year of War.* A note received from the Directorate of Personnel gives the number as 47.
2. *R.A.F. at War*, p. 43.

fort to the ship's company and infused misgiving into the mind of the unfriendly submarine commander. Besides this important patrol work, the coast defence aircraft occasionally brought reports as a result of which a number of people were rescued from torpedoed vessels. It was a coast defence unit which reported the position of the Japanese fleet off the east coast of India in April 1942. The unit had started functioning only on 1 April 1942 with two Wapitis at Vizagapatam.³ The first patrol was flown on 6 April. The pilot⁴ had hardly flown thirty miles off the port before he came upon a Japanese fleet consisting of an aircraft carrier, several cruisers and destroyers engaged in sinking a merchant vessel. This was a part of the Japanese fleet which had attacked Ceylon earlier. At great risk to itself, the aircraft shadowed the fleet long enough to ascertain its composition and movements and then flew back. Information was immediately sent to Calcutta and Ceylon. Later that day, Vizagapatam was bombed.

In addition to the reconnaissance work, the flights did other odd jobs whenever required. On 16 April 1941, No. 3 Flight with its three Atlantas aided by another from the Madras Flight co-operated with the R.A.F. in flying troops to Shaibah during the war in Iraq. Two of the pilots of the Karachi Flight also participated in this work. Two flights, No. 3 and No. 4, took part in operations during the invasion of Burma by Japan. No. 3 Flight which after its conversion to Hudsons had become a flight of No. 353 Squadron and had moved to Cuttack on 4 August 1942, carried out attacks on places along the Arakan coast including Akyab with its concentration of Japanese shipping and the Japanese supply bases in Buthidaung area.

The coast defence flights continued to operate throughout the rainy season of 1941. There was no incident but several crew were lost in bad weather. One aeroplane attached to the Cochin Flight was at the farthest point of its patrol when the engine gave out and it had to come down on the sea. Fortunately there was a merchant-ship nearby which rescued the aircrew. Another aircraft disappeared into the blinding rain and was never seen again. Yet another aircraft of the flight dived straight into the sea while the pilot was trying to hit a marker with his gun. A pilot belonging to the former No. 3 Flight was killed in a Hudson during an offensive reconnaissance against the Japanese fleet in the Bay of Bengal in the spring of 1942.

Towards the end of 1942 the six coast defence flights were disbanded. One reason was that the pilots, due to their not being properly trained or equipped, lacked the knowledge of advanced navigation necessary for efficient general reconnaissance work.⁵ Moreover, the R.A.F. was ready with improved equipment to take

3. Now called Vishakhapatnam.

4. P/O Barker. David Small was the navigator.

5. Air Chief Marshal R.E.C. Peirse.

over general reconnaissance duties. The personnel of the flights was absorbed in the new squadrons that were formed.

North-West Frontier Operations.

But the more important zone of service for the I.A.F. squadrons was the North-West Frontier where the aircraft were employed for purposes of watching the border area or engaging the tribesmen in arms who were in revolt against the British Government.

Air action on the frontier consisted of either blockade, proscription and destructive air action or co-operation with the land forces. Air blockade was designed to deny to the offending tribes or sections the normal amenities of life until they complied with the terms of the Government. It was a form of applying slow economic pressure and was not directed against either person or property. Air proscription was to deny certain areas to the hostile parties or individuals either as a base for hostile activities or as a route for those who had hostile intentions. Destructive action was directed against the property of those who might have committed offences against the Government or actively assisted persons guilty of such offences. Blockade, proscription and destructive action were never carried out without 24 or 48 hours' warning. Co-operation with land forces included tactical artillery and photographic reconnaissances, direct support and supply and message dropping.

The Indian Air Force undertook active operations for the first time in its history during the Waziristan operations of 1937. On the last day of August 1937, A Flight of No. 1 Squadron moved from Peshawar to Miranshah in North Waziristan for operations. The flight was based on Miranshah but occasionally the advanced landing grounds at Drazinda and Manzai were made use of. Six pilots formed the flight but after some time two of them left leaving only four to carry on the task. They operated from 5 September to 21 October and again from 17 November to 22 November in co-operation with the army columns which were sent into the tribal territory. Their work included patrol over convoys, tactical and photographic reconnaissance, close support and bombing and strafing of the proscribed areas. They usually carried 20-lb. bombs but occasionally 112 and 250-lb. bombs also were dropped. The work was not altogether free from risk as sometimes ground fire was encountered. On 5 October, one machine had to return early owing to its elevator control being shot through. In spite of their having no previous experience of operations, the pilots did not fail to achieve commendable operational efficiency and one of them found mention in the despatches also.

In the middle of June 1938 three aircraft of the flight were again deputed to Miranshah for a short tour of operations. They flew over Mami Ragha and Lwargi Narai north of Razmak, in support of the

ground troops and bombed and strafed the villages. Waziristan as a whole continued in an unsettled state and the recently constituted C Flight consisting of three Wapitis moved to Miranshah for operations on 25 September. The flight relieved No. 2 Squadron RAF on 27 September, and took over the entire responsibility for army co-operation work on the frontier. It co-operated in the land operations until its return to Ambala on 18 November and carried out more operational flying than its predecessor, the average being nearly four hundred hours' flying a month. One pilot flew a total of a hundred hours in one month. The tour of operations was marked by two accidents, neither, however, involving any loss of life. On 3 October, an aircraft overshot while landing and was written off. On 6 October, a Wapiti had to make a forced landing on the high hills between Shuidar and Datta Khel on account of the main patrol pipe having been shot through by hostile fire. The aircraft was wrecked but the pilot and his airgunner suffered only slight injuries. Thirteen sorties were flown to locate them but in vain. They however hid themselves in a cave and succeeded in reaching an army post on the next morning after an all-night trek.

Early in 1939 action was taken against the Malda Khel and the Tori Khel Wazirs who were subjected to air blockade. A Flight of No. 1 Squadron moved to Miranshah at the end of March 1939 to take part in these operations. During April the flight carried out proscription bombing. In May, it carried out a total of nearly 403 hours of flying—an effort which the Air Headquarters acknowledged as remarkable, considering the small number of aircraft composing the flight. On 15 June the flight returned to Ambala.

The Indian Air Force did not visit the frontier for more than a year. On 21 July 1940, B Flight of No. 1 Squadron took over the R.A.F. Station, Miranshah, from No. 28 Squadron R.A.F. It remained there till 25 September when No. 28 Squadron came back. During this period the flight operated in the Daur Valley in support of the land forces. On 7 August the aircraft flew eleven sorties in face of intense hostile fire. During the day's land operations one piquet was hardpressed by the hostiles. A pilot while on a sortie got a message that their ammunition was nearly exhausted. As the need for ammunition was urgent, the pilot and the airgunner removed ammunition from the magazine of the machine's rear gun, put it into their socks and dropped the same for use by the piquet. This extra ammunition enabled the piquet to hold on till another aircraft came and dropped 800 more rounds of ammunition and saved the situation.

In the beginning of March 1941, 'A' Flight of No. 1 Squadron again moved to Miranshah and carried out operations as and when called for. On 10 April a pilot forced-landed in hostile territory

near Spin Wan. His aircraft was destroyed by the hostiles but the pilot was able to escape.

In June, July and August Tochi Valley was the scene of operations. Air co-operation to the troops was provided by a detachment of No. 1 squadron and some pilots of the newly formed No. 2 Squadron attached to Miranshah for the purpose. No. 1 Squadron's Audaxes provided close support and No. 2 Squadron's Wapitis carried out tactical reconnaissances. On 6 July the aircraft flew for nearly 12 hours in operations. The next day a greater effort was called for, the number of flying hours for the day totalling 55. Besides strafing, many 112-lb and 20-lb bombs were dropped. The air support proved very effective.

The detachment of No. 2 Squadron withdrew from Miranshah on 27 July and 'A' Flight of No. 1 Squadron moved out on 8 August leaving 'B' Flight in charge of Miranshah station. 'B' Flight continued till 27 September when it handed over charge to 'A' Flight of No. 1 Squadron. The frontier was relatively quiet after this for some time. There were only minor clashes from time to time and the air force provided whatever support was necessary. On 19 August an aircraft of No. 2 Squadron located the position of a missing lorry and provided close support to the troops advancing towards the position indicated. Three more Wapitis also bombed the hostiles trying to prevent the advance with 112 and 20-lb. bombs. The lorry was recovered and brought to Mir Ali. Early in October, troops in the vicinity of Asad Khel were fired on by hostiles and air action was asked for. It was while engaged in this that one aircraft of No. 2 Squadron received many hits from hostile guns and was forced down on 6 October. The pilot and his airgunner received minor injuries but succeeded in making their escape. The aircraft was put in flames by shots fired from another aircraft.

On 1 December 'A' Flight of No. 3 Squadron relieved 'A' Flight of No. 2 Squadron at Miranshah to take its turn in frontier operations. The flight at Miranshah carried out in December a total of 45 hours' flying including road reconnaissance, tactical reconnaissance and mail dropping. The same type of operations continued in January.

For the rest of the period of the war, the North-West Frontier called for mainly normal watch and ward service from the air force which was based at Kohat. The squadrons of the Indian Air Force, were, however, occasionally summoned to deal with local risings or similar exhibitions of hostile activity by the tribesmen. Most of the squadrons of the Indian Air Force, thus, saw service in the North-West Frontier area where they had their initiation of fire and experience of flying in the hilly regions which prepared them for action in Burma which became the scene of their subsequent activity.

CHAPTER IX

FIRST BURMA CAMPAIGN

December 1941—May 1942

By far the most important theatre of operations for the Indian Air Force was Burma. Japan's invasion of Malaya and Burma in December 1941, following her attack on Pearl Harbour, was a direct threat to India's frontiers to meet which all the resources of India had to be mobilised. As has been seen, it was the impact of the Japanese war that led to a rapid expansion of the small Indian Air Force to a strength of nine squadrons. It was in Burma that the young force's ability to operate in real battle conditions was first tested. It came out of the test successfully.

Physical and Climatic Conditions of Burma

Air operations in Burma were to a large extent influenced by physical and climatic conditions. A proper appraisal of the work of the Air Force cannot be made unless the conditions which influenced its operations are taken into account. The principal physical features of Burma are its four great valleys formed by the four rivers, the Chindwin, the Irrawaddy, the Sittang and the Salween, all moving from north to south, the lowland in the Mandalay area and the Irrawaddy Delta and the mountains and high plateau that hem in this central lowland on three sides. An extension of the mountain mass of Central Asia virtually seals off the north and a mountain chain comprising the Patkai Hills, the Naga Hills and the Chin Hills extending from the Himalayas and rising up to 12,000 feet from the dividing line between the Arakan Hill Tracts and the rest of Burma. In the east the Shan plateau rises some 3,000 to 4,000 feet and a mass of rugged hills extends along the Siam border to the extreme southerly limit of Burma. The Pegu Hills (Pegu Yomas) form the watershed between the Irrawaddy and the Sittang. The central part of the Irrawaddy valley—the Mandalay area—is the dry zone of Burma where the rainfall averages only 20 to 40 inches a year; but in the mountains and the delta region the average rainfall is from 100 to 200 inches per year, the coastal area being the wettest region. The rainy season generally commences in the third week of May and ends with the third week in October. Squalls occur in the Arakan coast during the rainy season. Between October and February dense fog frequently makes the lowlands invisible.

Outside the dry central valley region the rest of Burma is covered with thick jungle and grasslands. Communication along the axis was good but east-west communication was limited to a few

ill-kept roads and tracks. The sick rate was particularly high in jungle areas, the greatest single scourge being malaria.

The thick jungles, rugged mountains, poor roads, seasonal rains and squalls, and diseases not only provided problems for the ground forces but also influenced air strategy and operations almost throughout the campaign in Burma. Japanese penetration into the country was effected under the cover of dense jungles which made reconnaissance from the air usually ineffective. Both during the initial stages of the campaign and later during the Arakan and Imphal operations, location of positions and observation of troop movements were extremely difficult tasks requiring flying at low heights at great risk. Flying over jungle-clad mountains, sometimes as high as 12,000 feet, particularly at night and during inclement weather conditions, demanded a high degree of skill from the pilots. The landing or baling out of forces was extremely hazardous. Clouds and ground mists often made observation impossible and the rainy season imposed a noticeable check on the operations. Torrential rains rendered air strips, hastily constructed under the stress of war, unserviceable for days. Electric storms carried death for the flier and caused many fatal accidents.

Japan struck at Pearl Harbour on 7 December 1941. Invasion of various areas followed in quick succession according to a carefully prepared plan. On 7-8 December the Japanese army poured from Indo-China into Siam which submitted on the 8th after a token resistance. The Japanese quickly reached the frontiers and became a menace to Burma which was ill-prepared for defence. Lieut. General D.K. Mcleod's Order of the Day on 9 December 1941 that "By air, sea, and land Burma is ready. Supported by the Royal Navy and powerful squadrons of the RAF we shall throw back the invaders" conveyed a misleading picture of the critical situation. Available forces for the defence of Burma amounted to two divisions, the 17th Indian Division and the 1st Burma Division, neither of them at full strength and totalling some 25,000 combatant troops besides some 10,000 line-of-communication troops. They were strung out to guard the eastern frontier of Burma from the Shan states bordering on Indo-China to Victoria Point at the far end of the Tenasserim strip, 800 miles away, as well as to defend Rangoon.

Air Garrison

The air garrison of the country comprised one squadron of the American Volunteer Group, armed with P40's ~~and~~ strength of 21 initial equipment based at Mingaladon, and No. 67. R.A.F. Squadron of a strength of about 16 Buffalo aircraft also based at this sector station. There was, besides, a communication flight equipped with two Tiger Moth aircraft belonging to the Burma Volunteer Air Force.

The main line of airfields ran from Victoria Point to Moulmein, to Rangoon and Mingaladon, then through Toungoo, Heho and Namsang up to Lashio in the north—a distance of some 800 miles. The aerodromes were well-equipped, hence airfield accommodation for a considerable air force was available in Burma. However, the weakness was that four main airfields between Toungoo and Lashio had little or no warning as the mountainous country to the east and south-east of this line of aerodromes made radar ineffective.

Reinforcements

Reinforcements were promised to supplement the inadequate air force but only a small proportion was made available. 113 Squadron R.A.F. with 13 Blenheim aircraft arrived in January and early February 1942. The aircraft of 45 Squadron R.A.F. (Blenheims) also arrived but were unaccompanied by personnel or "pack-up". Consequently throughout the campaign there was the equivalent of one bomber squadron only available for operations. The total fighter force actually available throughout the air campaign in Burma was three Hurricane squadrons (Nos. 17, 135 and 137). But the maximum number of Hurricanes in action against the Japanese did not exceed 30 Hurricanes and these arrived between January and the middle of February 1942. Besides, there was one squadron of Kittyhawks belonging to the American Volunteer Group—a volunteer force organised by Lieut. Colonel (later Lieut-General) Claire Chennault for service in China.

In respect of the general reconnaissance aircraft, No. 4 Indian Flight equipped with 4 Wapiti and 2 Audax aircraft arrived in Burma from Karachi at the end of December 1941. It was withdrawn from Moulmein when it became untenable and was replaced by No. 3 Indian Flight from Calcutta which with an initial equipment of 4 Blenheim I's operated from Bassein. In the third week of February 139 Squadron RAF equipped with six Hudson aircraft undertook the general reconnaissance requirements.

For army co-operation work two squadrons armed with Lysanders, No. 1 Squadron I.A.F. and No. 28 Squadron RAF were made available for operations.

For photographic reconnaissance there were, up to the middle of January, a few Buffalos of 67 Squadron with the necessary range. From the middle of January there was no long-range reconnaissance aircraft until the first week of February when two Hurricanes were made available.

Thus the mixed equivalent of three fighter squadrons, one bomber squadron, two army co-operation squadrons and one-half general reconnaissance squadron, joined action in the campaign.

Japanese Strength

From 1 January onwards the strength of the Japanese Air Force within close range was estimated at 150 plus disposed in the airfields of Prachaup Khirikhan, Meshot, Tak, Bangkok, Lampang and Chiangmai. In February the strength of the Japanese Air Force in the Burma theatre rose to 200 plus. After the fall of Singapore on 15 February 1942, the Japanese brought up reinforcements, bringing their air force, based largely on captured airfields in the Rangoon area, to a strength of 400 plus. The British effort during this period, however, fluctuated with reinforcements and losses. On 31 January 1942 the number of aircraft was 35 plus, on 14 February it rose to 53 plus but on 21 March it fell down to 42.

The Japanese fighters were of three types—the Army 97, the Army O.I. and the Navy "O". The former two had a top speed of 270 miles while the Navy "O" had a top speed of 315 miles an hour. None had protective armour or self-sealing petrol tank but all were highly manoeuvrable. The Japanese fighters had a radius of action of over 250 miles. For bombing, the Army 97 heavy bomber was generally employed. With its speed of about 200 miles an hour, a radius of action of 700 miles and a bomb load of 1½ tons, it was a formidable weapon. No self-sealing tank or armour was fitted. These aircraft usually operated in formations of not less than 27.

Of the Allied fighters, the P 40's had a radius of action of 400 miles while that of the Hurricanes was about 135 miles only. The Allies were much inferior to the Japanese in numbers, in the manoeuvrability of fighters and in the bomb lift, range and speed of the bombers. But the Japanese, on the other hand, suffered the grave disadvantage of not having armour or self-sealing tanks, both characteristic of all the types of the Allied aircraft. Moreover, both Hurricane II and P 40 were superior to the Japanese fighters in fire power. This together with their armour protection enabled them to fight on more or less equal terms with the Japanese fighters. In encounters with the Japanese fighters the P 40's using hit-and-run tactics fully exploited their superior diving and level flight speed while they nullified the superiority in manoeuvrability and rate of climb of the Japanese fighters by avoiding dog fights. Against the ill-defended Japanese Army 97 bombers the Allied fighters were unquestionably decisive. While dealing with the bombers the Americans sometimes used diving attack, frequently coming out of the dive to strike the bomber from below. The Allied bombers, the Blenheims, with their power-operated turret, were satisfactory for their task, though light on range and much inferior to the Japanese bombers in bomb lift and numbers.

Japanese pilots at the outbreak of war were well-trained. The average Japanese pilot had about 500-800 flying hours, and about

AERODROMES IN BURMA & THAILAND

DECEMBER 1941

SCALE

MILES 100 50 0 100 200 300 400 MILES



50 per cent of army pilots and 10 per cent of navy pilots had actual combat experience in China or in border fighting with the Soviet Union in 1939.¹ These experienced pilots were largely lost during the opening year and a half of the war. Replacement of the trained pilots was not, however, properly provided for. Average flying experience fell off throughout the war and was just over 100 hours, as contrasted to 600 hours for U.S. pilots, at the time of Japan's surrender.

Air operations during the first Burma campaign which ended in the withdrawal of the army to India fall under three heads:—

- (a) Fight for air superiority. Under this head fall the air battles over Rangoon resulting from the Japanese attempts to destroy the Allied Air Force mostly based round Rangoon and the Allied attacks on Japanese-held airfields with the object of destroying as many Japanese aircraft as possible.
- (b) Reconnaissance over the sea by Allied aircraft for signs of Japanese submarines and surface craft and protection of Allied shipping.
- (c) Air operations in support of the army first in Tenasserim and then during the withdrawal of the army from Rangoon up the Prome road and finally across the Chindwin to India.

Battle for Air Superiority 23 Dec. 1941 — 25 Feb. 1942

During the initial stages of the campaign the most serious fighting was confined to the opposing air forces, the Japanese land move into Burma not taking place until the third week of January. The struggle for air supremacy started with the Japanese air attack against Rangoon on 23 December 1941. On this occasion as well as on 25 December when a second attack was made, the Japanese bomber formation numbered between 70 and 80 with an escort of some 30 fighters. The Japanese were severely mauled on these two days as not less than 36 bombers and fighters were claimed as destroyed and many more damaged by the P 40's of the American Volunteer Group and the Buffalos of 67 RAF Squadron. The air battle continued intermittently till 25 February 1942. During this period 31 attacks were made by the Japanese, the heaviest after the Christmas bombings being those of the last week of January and 24-25 February. Between 23 and 29 January a total of 218 plus—mostly fighters—was put in to overwhelm the Allied fighter force. During this period some fifty Japanese bombers and fighters were claimed as destroyed. The third and last attempt to achieve air superiority over Rangoon

1. *The Army Air Forces in World War II*, Vol. I, edited by W.F. Craven and J.L. Cate, pp. 79-80.

was made by the Japanese on 24 and 25 February. On these two days they again sustained a loss of 37 fighters and bombers out of a total effort of 166 bombers and fighters. After this discomfiture, the Japanese gave up the battle for air superiority over Rangoon. All told the Allied air force of one squadron of P 40's of the American Volunteer Group, a half squadron of Buffalos and the equivalent of two squadrons of Hurricanes inflicted a loss of 130 bombers and fighters with 61 more claimed as probably destroyed—the greater proportion falling to the guns of the A.V.G. who "fought with ready devotion and resolute gallantry".²

At the same time counter-offensive action by the Allied fighters and bombers as a part of the battle for air superiority resulted in a loss of not less than 58 Japanese aircraft destroyed on the ground, not counting those destroyed by bombing attacks. Japanese airfields at Chiangmai, Mae-Haungsau Lampang, Rahaeng, Meshot, Prachaup Khirikhan, Jumbhorn and Kanchanburi were searched and attacked if aircraft were present. Later when in Japanese hands, Moulmein, Mingaladon and Highland Queen were also attacked and losses inflicted.

No. 1 I.A.F. Squadron's Part

In these operations the pilots of No. 1 Squadron of the I.A.F. played an active part though they were only trained for army-co-operation work and acquitted themselves creditably in their self-imposed task. No. 1 Squadron consisting of 12 Lysander aircraft arrived at Toungoo on 1 February. In the early hours of the morning following their arrival the Japanese carried out two raids on the airfield and inflicted some damage. No. 1 Squadron, however, escaped unscathed as the crew had taken the precaution of dispersing the aircraft even though the danger of a Japanese air raid was considered negligible. But the Japanese had thrown out a challenge which could not go unanswered. No. 1 Squadron had in its commanding officer, a leader of great zeal and originality. He realised that there was little scope for the type of work for which the pilots were trained and their aircraft designed. The Lysander, a slow and lumbering aircraft with little manoeuvrability, was essentially a reconnaissance aircraft and was unsuited for the new role of bomber which it was required to discharge. Nevertheless, he got his Lysander fitted with bomb racks on 2 February, and next day with two 250-lb. bombs, one under each wing, set out on a raid of the Japanese air base at Mae-Haungsau across the border, in Siam, from which the raiders were believed to have come. He was escorted by two New Zealanders in their Buffalos. Flying low and unobtrusively, he attained the target and dropped his load of 500 lbs. of bombs on the airfield's only hangar which contained an aircraft.

2. A/V/M. Stevenson's Despatch, dated 28 September 1942.

Bombing was accurate. Direct hits were scored and the hangar was smashed, and the aircraft damaged.

On the following day, he led his entire squadron, each aircraft loaded with 500 lbs. of bombs, over Mae-Haungsau. They scored direct hits on airfield buildings and a wireless station, besides some hits and near misses on aircraft dispersed round the landing ground. After the raid they proceeded to Heho where they spent the night. During this raid they went unescorted as they did usually on subsequent raids, for their safety against Japanese fighters which usually flew at great heights, they depended on camouflage and on their ability to fly low, almost at treetop level. The slow Lysander, rendered slower with its heavy bomb load, would have had no chance against the opposing fighters but the fact that during the operations one Lysander was shot down is to be attributed to the skill which the pilots had acquired through flying over the rough country in the North-West Frontier of India.

No. 1 Squadron also carried out bombing raids over the Japanese air bases at Chiengmai and Chiangrai in Siam. In these raids some pilots of No. 28 Squadron RAF also participated under the leadership of No. 1 Squadron's Commander. On 5 February No. 1 Squadron was called away to Mingaladon outside Rangoon for much needed reconnaissance and close support work for the army. The squadron, however, did not miss any opportunity for bombing. In all, No. 1 Squadron provided 41 bomber sorties against Japanese aerodromes, and direct support targets.³

Reconnaissance

There was a great dearth of general reconnaissance aircraft in Burma, and during the early stages of the campaign No. 4 Coast Defence Flight flew from Karachi to Moulmein with four Wapiti and two Audax aircraft for carrying out reconnaissance. Unfortunately, before the flight could get into action, the airfield was attacked by Japanese bombers and four of the six aircraft were destroyed. Despite this set-back, the flight, with its two remaining obsolete aircraft, did valuable work by carrying on anti-submarine patrols in the Gulf of Martaban and convoying ships. On one occasion these aircraft were instrumental in saving two boatloads of a torpedoed ship's crew. From day to day they continued this important, though unspectacular, task until 25 January 1942 when they withdrew to Bassein on account of the immediate Japanese threat to Moulmein which was eventually lost on 31 January. Here they were relieved by No. 3 Coast Defence Flight from Calcutta on 28 January and returned to Karachi.

No. 3 Flight arrived with four aircraft. The Blenheim I aircraft with which the flight had been equipped in the middle of

3. *ibid.*

December 1941, though obsolescent, were with their longer range and more powerful armament certainly an improvement on old Wapitis and Audaxes. In spite of its meagre equipment No. 3 Flight almost single-handed carried on the task of convoying troop-ships and supply vessels in and out of Rangoon until 17 February 1942, when it flew to Mingaladon, the strip at Bassein having been rendered unserviceable by a Japanese bombing raid referred to later. As a matter of fact even this under-sized flight was not available entirely for convoy duties as two of the Blenheims carried on reconnaissance over Japanese occupied territory, using Zayatkwin outside Rangoon, as a forward operating base. This imposed additional strain on the two Blenheims detailed for sea reconnaissance and convoy duties, but fortunately there were no attacks on shipping while No. 3 Flight was engaged in escort duties. From their landing strip cut out of a paddy field the two Blenheims had to operate under difficult conditions. Many a time, when they were required to be present over the Gulf of Martaban by dawn to meet the convoys, they had to take off in darkness with nothing but a couple of hurricane lanterns as a flare path. Thus they carried on until the third week of February when the Japanese carried out a heavy raid on Bassein and the air strip. There was no warning of the approach of Japanese aircraft. The crew were standing by, ready to take off as soon as a call came from the navy. The Blenheims were all at the inadequately concealed dispersal point, fully loaded with depth charges. The Japanese bombs fell across the dispersal point. One of the Blenheims received a direct hit and the petrol tanks caught fire which rapidly reached the four anti-submarine bombs, each weighing 250 lbs. and causing a great explosion. Further damage from the rapidly spreading fire was prevented only by the prompt action and gallantry of the pilots and the ground crew. While the pilots managed to taxi the Blenheims out of reach of the flames, the ground crew removed the petrol and other stores to a safe distance. One airman showed great courage in driving a bowser full of (100 octane) petrol through the blazing grass to safety. The bombing rendered the air strip unserviceable and the three remaining Blenheims were flown to Mingaladon, while the ground crew went by boat to Rangoon on 17 February and thence to Magwe. From Rangoon two Blenheims returned to Dum Dum airfield on 24 February, one remaining behind until two days before the city fell.

Direct Support

Direct air support of the army throughout the period of the land operations commencing from Tenasserim fighting to the withdrawal of the army into India was provided to the best of the limited means available. This however, fell far short of the extent desirable. Particularly after the debacle at Magwe, referred to later, when

most of the aircraft based there were destroyed by Japanese air action and after the subsequent liquidation of the Akwing based at Akyab the army had practically no air support. This lack of sufficient air support was due to the simple fact that there were not enough aircraft in existence. But what little effort was available was applied to the best advantage. There was indeed no fighter screen over the head of the ground forces but, as Lord Tedder has pointed out, "the fighting is most effective when the operations to secure and maintain superiority are not visible to those who are benefiting from it".⁴ Putting up an "air umbrella" is "a method of employing fighters which is both the most extravagant and the least effective"—a method which the Italians adopted in the first North African campaign to their detriment. The air campaign over Rangoon and the bombing of Japanese-held airfields, though not visible to the forces fighting in the front, proved to be very helpful to the army, as they reduced the Japanese scale of effort against the army by eliminating a large number of aircraft. Nevertheless, the air force also put up a great deal of effort in direct support of the army.

Bombing and fighter action in support of the army up to the fall of Rangoon was decided each evening at a general staff and air staff conference held in Rangoon. Subsequently, the programme was adjusted according to the requests made by the 17th Indian Division to which an Air Liaison Officer had been attached.

The Japanese launched their offensive in Burma against Tenasserim. But here as well as in the operations east of the river Sittang later, close support bombing operations were very difficult owing to dense jungle. Moreover, on account of frequent Japanese outflanking movements it was difficult for the crew to be sure of the position of the opposing troops which made bombing risky. Further difficulties arose out of the Japanese practice of frequently disguising themselves in captured uniforms or native dress, and using captured transport, native bullock carts, launches and private cars—all of which made recognition difficult.

Tenasserim Operations

Japanese operations in Tenasserim were generally east to west thrusts combined with pressure from the south. Mergui fell into their hands on 18 January 1942 and Tavoy, further north, a day later. In northern Tenasserim, operations commenced on 20 January with attacks against the Kawkareik pass position held by the 16th Indian Infantry Brigade. During 22-23 January the defenders were forced to withdraw to Moulemein, after suffering heavy loss in equipment.

Air action in support of the troops holding the Kawkareik position was difficult, since it was not possible to spot the opposing

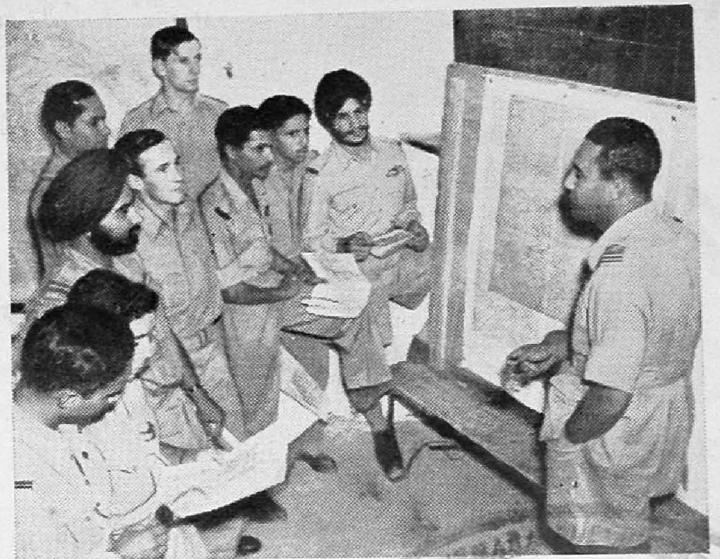
4. *Air Power in War—Lord Tedder.*

troops. The air force had therefore to remain content with indirect support. The Japanese forward landing ground and base depots at Mesoht were attacked and later on 21 and 22 January, the Blenheims attacked Rahaeng aerodrome and Mesarieng. The Allied fighters also succeeded in intercepting a strong formation of Japanese bombers and fighters out to bomb Moulmein, destroying 7 bombers and 9 fighters. During the period between 23 and 30 January, the available bomber force—an average of about 6 a day—with the aid of fighters acted in support of the land forces, attacking aerodromes, mechanical transport and the Japanese line of communication through Kawkareik, Myawaddy and Mesoht.

Moulmein was attacked on 30 January and as the position was untenable the Allied troops withdrew across the Salween to Martaban the next day. Martaban was evacuated on 9 February and the 17th Indian Division took up a line on the Bilin river by 15 February. From 30 January to 15 February all available bombers were employed in direct support of the army with fighter effort varying from 6 to 12 per day. Kado, Martaban, Paan, Moulmein, Minzi, Heinc, the Thaton road and the Dunzeik road were the places raided and river craft on the Salween, batteries, concentrations of troops, landing stages, railway stations, barracks and stores were attacked with successful results. In all 70,136 lbs. of bombs were dropped. The fighters, while providing a security for the bombers, also participated in these attacks. No. 1 Squadron which had moved to Mingaladon on 5 February after a brief but successful period of operations from Toungoo, lost no time in joining these operations. The day following their move, the aircraft of No. 1 Squadron together with those of No. 28 Squadron RAF attacked Moulmein dockyards and railway station. The target area was heavily bombed and strafed. For accuracy of strike the pilots resorted to dive-bombing though at great risk as Lysander aircraft were not built to stand the strain entailed in pulling out of the dive. Direct hits were scored on the railway station and buildings in the dockyard and three large fires were started. The squadrons returned without mishap, flying low over Martaban. No. 1 Squadron also carried out tactical and photographic reconnaissances.

During the second week of February the squadron was split up to meet the demands of other theatres for aircraft for reconnaissance work. While one flight remained at Mingaladon the squadron commander with some pilots went to Lashio to do reconnaissance work for the Chinese army in North Burma and another detachment went to Toungoo for similar work in that area. The flight left at Mingaladon went on carrying out reconnaissance for the army along the Siam border until its return to India. Its effort was ably supplemented by two Blenheims of No. 3 Flight based at Bassein. Using the airstrip at Zayatkwin

**Wg Cdr Mukerjee,
Officer Commanding
Kohat, pays a visit to
Miranshah and talks
to the pilots and
Army Liaison
Officers**



Sqn Ldr Mehar Singh, O.C., 6th IAF Squadron showing a photo-mosaic prepared by his Squadron to Air Marshal Baldwin



Air Cdr. H.J.C. Proud, AOC, Air HQ, India Command, pays a visit to an I.A.F.
Squadron on the Burma Front

as a forward operating base they carried on reconnaissance usually in Martaban, Moulmein, and Tavoy areas—then in Japanese occupation.

Reconnaissance by Blenheims was usually carried out twice a day, morning and evening, and each of about 3 hours' duration. Almost the whole of the journey was over Japanese occupied territory and was fraught with danger due to the activity of Japanese fighters and anti-aircraft guns. While their superior speed enabled the Blenheims to evade the fighters, they managed, by flying at a very low altitude, to escape the Japanese guns which found no opportunity to aim at them. When No. 1 Squadron detachment returned to India, the whole burden of reconnaissance for the army in this area fell on the handful of Indian pilots of No. 3 Flight.

The Bilin river line of defence could not hold out for long. The river was not a formidable obstacle and the country was hilly and covered with considerable patches of dense jungle rendering observation difficult. After fierce fighting for three days, the Allied withdrawal to the Sittang river line commenced early in the morning of the 20th. In the early hours of 22 February the crossing of the Sittang river over the railway bridge near Mokpalin started but before it could be completed the bridge was blown up on the 23rd morning to prevent its being captured. A large number of those trapped on the eastern side of the river succeeded in reaching the opposite bank but many perished and practically all transport and equipment was abandoned.

During the period 16 to 23 February air operations in support of the army continued at the maximum intensity practicable. Bombers carried out 102 sorties in which 89,992 lbs. of bombs were released in low-flying attacks on the Japanese forces. Fighters were employed in protecting the bombers and giving support to the army. Particular mention may be made of the air action against a Japanese column of some 300 vehicles on the road between Bilin and Kyaikto on 21 February during which 38 fighter and 8 Blenheim sorties were made. Direct hits were scored and the attack may have accounted for the reduced scale and intensity of the Japanese attack on the Sittang bridgehead.

There was no attempt to defend the Sittang river line as the 17th Indian Division was "unfit for any of the normal operations of war". Instead, the remnants of the Division were concentrated in the area Waw-Pegu. Waw fell to the Japanese on 3 March and a considerable number of Japanese troops crossed the Pegu river north of Pegu to cut the Prome road north of Rangoon, while other troops landed on the coast west of the Rangoon river.

On 6 March the Rangoon-Pegu road was cut south-west of Pegu. An attempt to re-open the road failed and the retention of Rangoon was considered impossible. Necessary destructions were

carried out and the army moved out of Rangoon on the morning of 7th March by the Prome road.

With the Japanese approach to the Sittang river Rangoon had become untenable as an air base. The warning machinery had practically ceased functioning. A mixed wing was therefore formed at Magwe on 20 February and another at Akyab on 12 March with a base organisation in India to provide what fighter and bomber support could be given using the advanced landing grounds in the Rangoon area. In view of the rapidly diminishing warning facilities the aircraft were flown off the parent air fields of Mingaladon and Zayatkwin to "kutcha" strips at night to escape night bombing.

The last battle for air superiority over Rangoon, as has already been noted, was fought on 24 and 25 February. It was well that this battle in which the Japanese suffered severe losses was fought almost on the eve of the evacuation from Rangoon for it kept them quiet for some time to come; otherwise they might have wrought havoc on the retreating forces at a time when the Allied fighter and bomber effort was at a low ebb, there being an average of 17 fighters and 10 bombers only, and was quite inadequate for providing cover to the exposed columns.

After their severe reverse over Rangoon, the Japanese fighters were occupied in a purely defensive role over the area in which their army was advancing as the Allied bombers were doing their best to hinder their movements. During this critical phase up to 7 March, 96,800 lbs. of bombs were released on troop concentrations, trains, boats on the Sittang and mechanical transport columns with satisfactory results. Offensive fighter patrols were also maintained from forward bases round Rangoon.

During this period the only I.A.F. aircraft in the area was a Blenheim of No. 3 Flight. After the withdrawal from Mingaladon of the two other Blenheims of this flight on 24 February this aircraft carried on reconnaissance work for the army until two days before the city was evacuated. An estimate of the risk undergone by pilots can be formed from the fact that when this aircraft returned to Dum Dum it was found to be full of bullet holes, eight of which were in the self-sealing petrol tank.

Another aircraft, a Lysander belonging to No. 1 Squadron, was at Toungoo where it had been sent in the second week of February to carry out reconnaissance from there. Its pilot ably seconded by his air gunner and a sergeant to help maintain his aircraft, continued his work until 29 February. Toungoo town and the airfield were frequently raided by the Japanese aircraft and with the total absence of fighter protection at Toungoo, various ruses had to be adopted for ensuring the safety of the one and only Lysander against attack. Anti-aircraft guns provided inadequate protection

and on one occasion the air gunner had to fire the rear gun of the Lysander which was on the ground against the attacking fighters. Reconnaissance was daily carried out over the Siam border and all approaches from the Sittange river for signs of Japanese movements, but detection was difficult due to dense forest. Success was, however, occasionally achieved as when, by following a trail from a small clearing the presence of some elephants had first aroused his suspicion, the pilot came upon a concentration of Japanese troops whose presence was unknown to the army.

This routine but important job was sometimes changed for more adventurous tasks such as delivering surprise strafing attacks on Mesarieng and Mae-Haungsau airfields in Siam. One raid particularly deserving of mention was carried out on 28 February when as a reprisal for a rather heavy attack on Toungoo on the previous day, the pilot visited the Mae-Haungsau airfield from where the attackers had come. Approaching from behind and flying very low, he took the Japanese by surprise and opened fire on the Japanese soldiers working on the airfield and released his bombs on the wireless station, destroying the wireless cabin. The Lysander received a bullet hole in the tail plane. The next day he moved to Lashio in response to the call of the squadron commander.

The Allied air bases in general lay on the route to the north via Toungoo up the valley of the Sittang and so from the air point of view the Prome route was unsatisfactory since there were no air bases suitable for the operation of modern fighters and bombers—except Magwe. Indeed the only other aerodromes were at Meiktila where a runway had been completed and Myitkyina, 600 miles to the north, with an incomplete runway. But Meiktila was rather too far to the north and east to be effective in the initial stages and had only slight warning facilities. But, fortunately, in anticipation of withdrawal along the Prome road, a series of strips had been cut into the hard paddy land along this line of communication which enabled some sort of cover to be provided to the withdrawing troops. The "kutchas" strip at Zigon was the first to be used for this purpose. From here the Hurricanes carried out about 12 to 18 sorties a day over the line from Zigon to Rangoon until 11 March. Later, operations were carried out from Parklane, another "kutchas" strip north of Prome. The column of the retreating army was some 40 miles long, mostly mechanical transport vehicles and tanks bound to the road, and so provided an admirable target for air attack, but owing mainly to the air superiority established on 25 February the army was able to withdraw without heavy molestation from the air. During this period the Allied bomber force was also actively carrying out attacks either to reduce the Japanese scale of air attack or in direct support of the army. A total of 31,500 lbs. was dropped between 7 and 21 March on

the Japanese troop concentrations, aerodromes, road and railway communications and river craft.

For five days during this withdrawal, from 7 to 11 March, the handful of pilots of No. 1 Squadron which had moved to Magwe from Lashio on 5 March, after completing their operational commitments with the Chinese carried out a continuous patrol with their Lysanders over the retreating army. On 7 March two pilots of this squadron took part in the rescue of two aircraft under dramatic circumstances. Evacuation of the Mingaladon airfield had already taken place but two serviceable Hurricanes had been left behind by the RAF. Aircraft were precious commodities during this period of acute shortage and an attempt to bring the two aircraft back was well worth making. The task was risky but on the call of their commander, F/Lt. Raza and F/O Rajendra Singh volunteered to undertake it and carried two RAF Hurricane pilots in the rear cockpits of their Lysanders to Mingaladon on the 7th. While they were there two Japanese reconnaissance aircraft passed over and they ran the risk of being surprised by the Japanese who were then converging on the airfield, but the Hurricanes and the Lysanders managed to leave the deserted aerodrome just in time and came back safely. On 12 March the pilots of this squadron handed over their few remaining Lysanders to the Burmese Communications Flight and were brought back to India in a Flying Fortress.

By 25 March the retreating forces were concentrated in All-anmyo-Prome area. The Chinese Sixth Army which had entered Burma by the first week of February had taken over the defence of the Karen, Mongpan and Kengtung area.

On the Sixth Army front the months of February and March had passed with little incident. The reconnaissance requirements of the Chinese Army were met by a flight of No. 1 Squadron Lysanders which had, as has already been noted, been detached from Mingaladon in the second week of February for this purpose. The flight operated from Lashio and carried out numerous sorties until 5 March when it was withdrawn to Magwe.

On the Prome front the Allies were forced to fall back from one position to another. Prome fell on 1 April and Yenangyaung was evacuated on 17 April. The evacuation of Mandalay started on 25-26 April, and by 30 April the withdrawal of the forces north of the Irrawaddy was complete. The Allied troops were in no condition to make any further stand and the retreat to Imphal through Ye-u and Kalewa began. The Japanese attempted to prevent the withdrawal by moving up the Chindwin on river craft from Monywa which they had captured on 30 April but failed. Withdrawal from Kalewa was effected by 20 May. The Chinese resistance had also crumbled in the meantime. Pyinmana fell to the Japanese on 20 April, Lashio on 29 April, Bhamo on 4 May,

and Myitkyina four days later. The Chinese forces were split up, some retiring to China while others eventually found their way to India.

During these operations the Japanese air forces had practically undisputed control in the air. This was the result of their successful raids on Magwe and Akyab airfields following a devastating Allied air attack on Mingaladon air field on 21 March. Allied air reconnaissance had revealed a concentration of Japanese aircraft on Mingaladon airfield. To cripple this force 10 Hurricanes and 9 Blenheims fought their way through a screen of Japanese naval "O" fighters and delivered a smashing blow on the airfield on 21 March. In the course of this operation 11 Japanese fighters were destroyed and 2 damaged in air combat and 16 fighters and bombers were either destroyed or damaged on the ground at the cost of 1 Hurricane lost and some others badly shot up. Further attacks were planned but they were foiled by the Japanese air attacks which, commencing on 21 March, continued over a period of 25 hours during which the scale of attack reached about 230 fighters and bombers and some 200 tons of bombs were dropped. 9 Blenheims and at least 3 P 40's were destroyed on the ground, 5 Blenheims were rendered unserviceable and 3 Hurricanes were destroyed in air combat. Out of the remaining 20 aircraft which also had suffered damage, 3 P 40's were withdrawn to Loiwing on 22 March and 6 Blenheims and 11 Hurricanes were flown out to Akyab on the day following. The Japanese lost 4 aircraft with 1 probable and 3 damaged. This grave reverse has been attributed to Burwing's weakness in fighters, weakness of the warning system and the complete absence of aircraft pens and bad dispersal arrangements. Akwing at Akyab also suffered a similar fate about this time. In the course of attacks made on 23, 24 and 27 March, 7 Hurricanes were lost in air fighting and the same number of Hurricanes and one Valentia were destroyed on the ground, the Japanese loss being 4 aircraft destroyed and 3 probably destroyed.

These two actions in effect terminated the R.A.F. activities based on Burma. Though Burwing was continued as an organisation, it was not re-equipped, as the requirements of North-Eastern India and Ceylon were given priority. Moreover it was considered uneconomical to maintain a small force in Burma in view of the lack of warning facilities and increasing Japanese strength. As a matter of fact 8 Hurricanes which were flown into Loiwing on 6 April lasted only a few days against Japanese attack.

During the eight weeks from 21 March when the Magwe action took place, until 20 May, when the army was finally withdrawn to India air action continued from the bases in India. Fighter action was carried out by an RAF Mohawk squadron based at Dinjan in Assam, but was confined to an area within its limited range. At the same time bombers of the R.A.F. and U.S.A.A.F. operated from

Tezpur and Dinjan in Assam or from bases in the Calcutta area, using Chittagong as a landing ground. The United States bombers belonged to the Tenth Air Force which had been formed on 12 February for service in India-Burma-China theatre. They started bombing operations on 2 April taking off either from Asansol or from Dum Dum. Rangoon was their target but after the fall of Myitkyina on 8 May, the airfield there received their chief attention. 103 tons of bombs were released in these attacks. In all, 58 raids—13 by U.S.A.A.C. and 45 by R.A.F. took place in support of the army's withdrawal, some to reduce the scale of the Japanese air attack and the remainder in direct support of the army. Most of the bombings took place on General Alexander's right flank, although 3 raids were on the Chinese front. Particulary deserving of mention were the attacks on a concentration of river craft at Monywa on 4 and 5 May which were largely instrumental in foiling the Japanese attempt to encircle the right flank of the Allied forces then withdrawing from Ye-u to Kalewa.

During the air action in Burma which commenced on 23 December the main brunt of the fighting was borne by P 40's of the A.V.G. with the R.A.F. giving able support. The I.A.F. also acquitted itself creditably. The general standard of performance was good and No. 1 Squadron in particular received many messages of approbation. Its outstanding feat was the way it turned itself into a bomber unit in one day. For the first time in R.A.F. history the Lysander was made to carry a load of 500 lbs. of bombs. For their successful raid on Martaban on 6 February, No. 1 and No. 28 Squadrons were congratulated by General Wavell, Chief of the ABDA Command, who later felicitated S/Ldr. Majumdar, the commander, in person. No. 1 Squadron Flight at Lashio rendered good service on the Chinese front and as a token of appreciation of their work the Chinese presented gold wings to some of the pilots. Air Vice-Marshal D.P. Stevenson, commander of the air force in Burma since 1 January 1942, also described the standard of accuracy in bombing by No. 1 Squadron's Lysanders as satisfactory.⁵ Several war correspondents in Burma spoke highly of their performance. In recognition of his leadership and fighting spirit, S/Ldr Majumdar was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross—the first to be awarded to an officer of the I.A.F. Particularly notable was the ardour and enthusiasm with which the pilots as well as the ground crew discharged their tasks. The ground crew worked hard under difficult conditions and as a result aircraft maintenance was throughout excellent.

Replacements and aircraft spares were scanty and so alternative arrangements had often to be improvised to keep the aircraft serviceable. Wooden wheels were made to serve the purpose of tail-wheels and motor lorry tubes were used in aircraft tyres. No. 3

5. A/V/M Stevenson's Despatch, p. 5.

Coast Defence Flight crew had, in addition to servicing their own aircraft, to maintain the Hudsons of 139 R.A.F. squadron. Indeed, the effort of the ground crew was magnificent and the award of M.B.E. to W/O Harjinder Singh, the chief of the Ground Crew, was a recognition of their sterling work.

During the whole of these operations No. 1 Squadron lost only *one* aircraft and its crew due to hostile action.

CHAPTER X

THE BUILD-UP

The first phase of the Burma Campaign was over. The Allied army had, in General Stilwell's words, taken "the hell of a beating". The Air Force had practically ceased to exist.

From May 1942 till the end of the monsoon in 1943 was the period of building up, slow but unceasing. Time and again the requirements of this "forgotten theatre" were shelved or diverted to other areas upsetting plans for offensive operations. Accordingly, during this period the operations were limited to patrol activities with the exception of two separate and small-scale offensive operations viz., the abortive Arakan campaign of December 1942 and Brigadier Wingate's spectacular expedition of February 1943.

The fall of Burma by May 1942 exposed India to an imminent threat of invasion. The forces available for defence were woefully weak. There were only one British and six Indian divisions for the defence of the whole of India and Ceylon and these were neither fully equipped nor trained for the type of warfare required in the eastern theatre, and all were below strength and deficient of ancillary units. The inadequate forces disposed for the defence of Assam were ill-prepared to meet the apprehended Japanese invasion. Fortunately the attack did not immediately materialise and the coming of monsoon in the middle of May made it improbable for several months. India, therefore, had a much needed respite in which to prepare to meet the invader.

Much, indeed, had to be done to build up a fighting force equipped with suitable arms and adequately trained to operate under the conditions prevailing on the Indo-Burma frontier, to solve the problem of communication and supply and to do hundreds of other jobs necessary to wage a modern war, in short, to build a firm foundation on which to base future operations.

The Air Force had to be formed practically from scratch. There were "about fourteen battle-weary squadrons, most of them sadly depleted and many with obsolete types of aircraft and with few reserves behind them. Batches of Air Force personnel, disorganised and unequipped, had contrived to escape to India after our defeat in Malaya and the Dutch East Indies. Apart from the Burma squadrons there was only the handful of obsolete service aircraft and converted airliners that had composed the former Air Forces in India."¹

1. Air Chief Marshal R.E.C. Peirse's Despatch on Air Operations, 21 June 1943—15 November 1943, p. 18.

A small maintenance organisation existed in the north-west but it was out-of-date. The late campaign had clearly proved, if any proof was necessary, that a strong air force was an essential prerequisite to victory. Advantage would lie with the side possessing the mastery of the skies. A steady flow of personnel and equipment was therefore maintained and, as a result, the Air Force which consisted of a handful of obsolete service aircraft and converted airliners in March 1942, had, at the end of December 1942, twenty-nine squadrons fully operational on modern aircraft. Besides, twenty more squadrons were at various stages of training and equipment. There were also two transport squadrons and one photographic reconnaissance unit. The aircraft numbered 1,443.

By June 1943, the number of squadrons in the India Command rose to forty-three of which thirty-eight were fully operational. In addition, six other squadrons were engaged in refresher or "change of role" training and five were being re-equipped. At the end of November 1943 the position further improved. There were forty-nine squadrons trained and equipped up to the standard of modern operational requirements. In addition there were twelve squadrons at various stages of training and equipment. The number of aircraft rose from 1,443 at the beginning of the year to 2,453 in June and to 3,699 in December 1943. In November 1943, 1,585 aircraft were with the flying units and the remainder with the maintenance or storage units. The total front-line strength in November was 519 aircraft of which 370 were serviceable.

Bengal Command

Only a part of the air strength being built up in the India theatre was available for operations on the India-Burma frontier. Though contact with the Japanese land forces was established only in this area and a thrust into India across the Chindwin was to be apprehended, the possibility of a sea-borne invasion or air raids and the necessity of countering the activities of Japanese submarines and providing protection for shipping rendered a dispersion of available aircraft in suitable areas indispensable. Besides Ceylon, which was an area of strategic importance and required a strong air force for its defence, Karachi, Madras and Cuttack were some of the other areas where aircraft were needed for vital operations. Even when the threat of sea-borne attack receded, these areas could not be denuded of air strength as bombing raids were always possible and submarines were a continuing menace.

The defence of Bengal and air operations in the India-Burma theatre were entrusted to two composite fighter-bomber Groups—221 and 224—consisting of eighteen squadrons in all. 224 Group came into being on 1 April 1942. 221 Group had returned from Burma. The former had its headquarters in Calcutta and the latter at Asansol.

These were later moved forward—224 Group to Chittagong (December 1942) and 221 Group to Calcutta. These two Groups were placed under the operational command of Air Headquarters, Bengal, formed in April-May 1942 with headquarters at Barrackpore to control and co-ordinate their operations. In January 1943 there were 417 serviceable aircraft of various types in the Bengal Command, and this number rose to 536 in June.

The increase in numbers of aircraft was not the true measure of the improvement in air strength. The considerable increase in the operational efficiency of the air force due to the replacement of obsolescent types by more modern aircraft has also to be taken into account. The number of Hurricanes, Spitfires, Vengeances, Liberators, Dakotas and Beaufighters increased whereas the older types viz, the Mohawk, D.C.2 and 3 were being replaced. Moreover, newer types viz, Mitchells and Mosquitos were also introduced.

The effort of the Bengal Command was supplemented by the American Tenth Air Force. Formed on 12 February at Ohio, it was an organisation largely existing on paper, having only a few bombers to begin with. But by the end of June 1942 the Force had been built to a sizeable strength when there was a setback, all available bombers being ordered to the Middle East. Aircraft, however, began to arrive during the last three months of 1942 and the unit steadily grew in strength. In January 1943 the aircraft of the USAAF numbered 114. In June the number rose to 202 of which 149 were ready for combat and those included 36 heavy bombers, 38 medium bombers, 67 fighters and 8 photographic reconnaissance aircraft. On 15 November the number of serviceable aircraft was 210 of which 51 were heavy bombers, 40 medium bombers, 44 fighter-bombers, 70 fighters and 5 photographic reconnaissance aircraft.

The extent of expansion of the air forces was determined by the number of airfields available. In March 1942 there were in India only 16 airfields with one all-weather runway and 20 with fair-weather strips. Airfield construction was given top priority and at the end of November 1942, there were 148 airfields—83' with one all-weather runway of over 1,600 yards, 60 fair-weather strips, and 5 complete in all respects to standard runways and accommodation. The construction of airfields could not keep pace with the requirements and even at the end of June 1943 there was a lack of all-weather airfields in the forward area. To overcome this deficiency, a large number of paddy strips were prepared. By November 1943 the position had improved and there were 285 airfields with 15 others under construction. Of these, no less than 140 were complete in all respects, 64 had one all-weather runway and 71 had fair-weather strips or landing areas.

During the monsoon period May to October (1942) air operations were necessarily on a small scale but were notable for the skill

and determination with which the crew operated in bad weather. Targets on the Burma coast and in the Chindwin valley were attacked with success.

By January 1943 the Allied air strength had reached a stage when it was possible to pass from defensive to offensive operations. Establishment of air superiority and prevention of Japanese air activity against Allied troops was the primary task of the Allied air forces. Another task allotted to them was the disruption of Japanese war effort by bombing Rangoon, and disrupting the lines of communication and means of transport whether by water or by land. Direct support of the army, including supply dropping, was chiefly limited to the First Arakan Campaign (December 1942—May 1943) and with the 77th Brigade (Wingate's first expedition, February—June 1943). Reconnaissance over the Bay of Bengal and photographic reconnaissance over Burma were the other assignments.

The land as well as air operations were restricted during the monsoon. The Japanese almost entirely discontinued air operations and withdrew their units for training, rest and re-equipment. The Allies also used this period principally in preparing for the coming dry weather campaigns by training and re-equipping the squadrons. But operations were conducted whenever possible in order that the Japanese administrative and reinforcement activities should be dislocated to the maximum extent possible. Monsoon conditions are never very bad over Central Burma and navigational aids allowed Allied air operations to be conducted during the monsoon of 1942 with good results.

The battle for air superiority followed the usual pattern, though there was no repetition of the large scale and decisive air battles fought over Rangoon. During May to October 1942, the Japanese air force was almost completely inactive. With the improvement in the weather, the Japanese increased their effort. In the first few attacks the Japanese bombers achieved some success and losses on both sides were approximately equal. The defending fighters were unable for lack of sufficient warning to attain the necessary height advantage to cope with the better manoeuvrable Japanese fighters which invariably escorted the bombers. In the Christmas week, December 1942, the Japanese carried out five raids in the Calcutta area, four by night and one by day, without virtually any opposition. They lost only one aircraft. But on 15 January when three Japanese aircraft again attempted to raid Calcutta, all the three were shot down by a single aircraft belonging to a flight of night Beaufighters which had arrived for the defence of Calcutta only the previous day. A further attempted raid on 19 January by four aircraft was again foiled, two of the aircraft being definitely and another probably destroyed. The warning system had improved and the Japanese aircraft were finding it increasingly difficult to catch the Allied aircraft at a dis-

advantage. After the failure on 19 January, the Japanese confined their attention to the forward bases.

Again, during the monsoon period from June to September 1943, the Japanese Air Force was practically inactive, only a few intercept sorties over Burma and several reconnaissance flights over the Allied territory or the battle area being flown. The bulk of their air force withdrew from the forward airfields and Allied air supremacy remained unquestioned. From October, however, there was a marked increase of Japanese effort. Whereas their scale of effort varied from 19 sorties only in June to 66 sorties in September, October 1943 registered a total of 267 sorties. By the middle of November their bombers had attacked Chittagong, Agartala, Feni, Palel, Imphal and Kumbhirgram. The Hurricanes that formed the bulk of the defending force could not, with their inferior performance, effectively intercept the raiders. The advent of Spitfires in November, however, gave the Allies the balance of advantage. In the first fortnight of November the Spitfires shot down all the three Dinah aircraft that had come to reconnoitre the Chittagong area. After this the Japanese activity petered out.

Attainment of air supremacy was aided by the bombing of Japanese held aerodromes in Burma whenever they were known to be occupied. Operations against the Japanese forward aerodromes had been launched as early as November 1942 when there were indications that the Japanese intended to undertake operations based on them, and these were so successful that at the beginning of 1943 no aircraft appeared to be based on these aerodromes. Their bombers retired to bases in Thailand to escape damage from Allied air action with the consequent decrease in their scale of effort.

Destruction of Communications

The task of destroying the communications was primarily allotted to the bombers. The R.A.F. bombers attacked the short-range targets within a radius of 250 miles from the forward aerodromes, while those of the U.S.A.A.F. with their longer range and bigger armament, attacked the more distant objectives. The United States bombers generally operated by day. Targets included aerodromes, railway centres, store dumps, rivers, roads, bridges, etc. The places visited included Akyab, Prome, Taungup, Mandalay, Maymyo, Myitinge, Thazi, Kanbalu and Rangoon. R.A.F. light bombers were escorted by fighters though fighter opposition was seldom encountered. Unescorted U.S. bombers were able to hold their own against the opposing fighters and on several occasions got the better of them.

Bomber activity, small at the beginning, mounted in intensity as more and more aircraft were received. In addition to the attacks on communications, the bombers also attacked oil installations at

Thilawa, Syriam, and Chauk. Besides the bombers, fighters were successfully employed in attacks against every means of transportation. Transport aircraft were more and more proving their value in the conduct of land operations. Forward troops in the Chin hills and in the Sumprabum area were provided with supplies. Supplies were also dropped on Radar and Observer Corps posts isolated by rains during the monsoon. Troops were landed at Fort Hertz, a frontier outpost in the north of Burma, where the garrison had to rely solely on air supply, there being no land link between the Fort and India. Brigadier Wingate's expedition into Burma, referred to later, was planned on the basis of air supply. During the first six months of 1943, 1,417 tons of supplies were carried by the transport aircraft.

The IV Corps front in the centre was more or less quiet and land operations were confined mainly to holding the Japanese and preventing interference with the construction of the lines of communication from Imphal to Tamu and Tiddim. Calls for direct support of the army were therefore not many, but the few attacks on the objectives pointed out by the army were in most cases effective though they were mainly in the jungle country. The fighters gave whatever little support the ground patrols required and attacked Japanese positions and the lines of communication immediately in the rear of the front line. The fighters also provided protective patrols over incoming convoys and carried out reconnaissance of the forward positions.

The Arakan front required more help during the Allied land offensive of December 1942. Here the 14th Indian Division consisting of four brigades subsequently reinforced by four other Indian brigades and one British brigade made a bold, though unsuccessful, bid to capture the Mayu Peninsula and Akyab, about 90 miles south of the India-Burma frontier. Arakan stands between the Arakan Yoma and the Bay of Bengal. It is studded with steep little hills covered with jungle, paddy fields, scrub and swamp. The coastal strip of Arakan extending from Maungdaw to Foul Point opposite Akyab is known as the Mayu Peninsula. It is split by the steep 1,500-foot Mayu range running parallel to the coastline. East of the Mayu Range is a river of that name the estuary of which divides the peninsula from the island of Akyab in the south and from Rathedaung in the east. The object of the Army on the Arakan Front was firstly to clear the Japanese from the Mayu Peninsula and the area south of Rathedaung, and subsequently to capture Akyab.

With Chittagong as the base of operations the advance began in the middle of December 1942 and by the end of the month two units marching on either side of the Mayu range reached near Donbaik, 10 miles above Foul Point, and another thrust reached

near Rathedaung. Absence of supplies held up the movement forward for some time but when advance was resumed on 6 January 1943, the Japanese offered stiff resistance. The Allied drive on Rathedaung was repulsed and repeated attempts to capture Donbaik culminating in the final attack on 18 March failed against stubborn resistance from the Japanese dug-in positions.

In the meantime a Japanese force of about three battalions under Colonel Tanahashi began a counter-offensive. The British flank guard in the Kaladan valley was scattered and a Japanese attempt to cut off the 55th Brigade at Rathedaung was foiled only by the gallantry of the 2/1 Punjab, and the brigade managed to withdraw up the Mayu river. Tanahashi's troops then crossed the Mayu river (1st week of April) and by straddling the Mayu range threatened to cut off the 6th Brigade on the western side and the 47th brigade on the eastern side of the Mayu range. Both these extricated themselves with great difficulty after suffering heavy losses. A further attempt at encirclement was foiled by a speedy withdrawal northward. On 12 May Maungdaw which had been prepared as an advanced base was evacuated. The campaign ended in dismal failure.²

During the advance down the Mayu Peninsula the R.A.F. gave close support to the troops. They carried their attacks as far south as the Foul Point. The Japanese lines of communication in the forward area received special attention from light bombers and fighters and, within a short period, movement by day or moonlit nights, by water or by well-defined land routes, was completely stopped. It was, however, difficult to prevent movement through the forests and jungle areas and on dark nights. Objectives were not visible and so a new form of warfare was adopted. Targets were indicated by pinpointed positions, by bearing and distance from given points or by smoke shells fired by Allied artillery. This manner of attack achieved unexpected success.

A particularly successful series of sorties was directed against the Japanese positions near Kanzauk on 8 and 9 March. These sorties held up the Japanese advance at this point and enabled a large proportion of the Allied forces, which might otherwise have been cut off, to retire successfully. Maximum effort with the forces available continued to be maintained. On 9 April, 117 sorties were made by the fighters in the forward areas on offensive and defensive tasks. On 23 April, 33 close-support sorties were made by light bombers which dropped 29,510 lbs. of high explosive bombs. In May weather conditions gradually deteriorated, considerably curtailing operations and with the advance of the Japanese in the Arakan, the strips at Maungdaw and other "kutcha" strips were evacuated but light bomber

2. For a fuller account of the fighting in Arakan see *The Arakan Operations*, a publication of the C.I.S. Historical Section, New Delhi.

and fighter support continued to be provided in direct support of the ground forces. In all, the R.A.F. put up 2,000 sorties during the campaign.

The Japanese air force operated in support of their ground forces throughout these operations. In February, seven raids were made on the Allied forward troops on the Mayu-Rathedaung area, three by fighters and four by escorted bombers. The activity of the Japanese Air Force appreciably increased as their army launched the counter-offensive. They bombed the R.A.F. forward strips in order to push its fighters back and deprive the Allied forces of fighter support. In March and April, besides carrying out numerous sorties against the ground forces and forward aerodromes, they provided fighter cover for their troops and intercepted some of the Allied attacks on them. Their effort met with some degree of success.

The only other land operation of note during 1943 was a long range penetration into Burma by the 77th Indian Infantry Brigade led by Brigadier Wingate. The plan of the operation was that the brigade comprising 3,000 officers and men, specially trained for the purpose would enter Burma and cut the railway line between Mandalay and Myitkyina and harass the Japanese in other ways. Contact would be maintained by wireless and the air forces would carry supplies. The expedition started in February, and a fortnight's march took the columns to the railway which was then cut in more than 75 places over a length of 30 miles. Plans for similar dislocation of the Mandalay—Lashio Railway had to be given up as, after carrying on operations in the jungles under extremely difficult conditions for four months, Wingate's men were in no condition to stand further strain. The force was dispersed into small groups. Most of them reached the Chindwin near Sittaung, some went further north and one marched eastward, crossed the Salween and reached China. By June 1943 the Wingate expedition was over.³

Wingate's plan of dispensing with ground communications did not work as smoothly as was expected. In the initial stages the air supply scheme went well, though there was a serious lapse which diminished the effectiveness of the expedition. Only a few days after the crossing of the Chindwin the troops' mail was by mistake dropped on to a Japanese post disclosing the composition and strength of the Chindits and thus removing the element of uncertainty and surprise which might have influenced the Japanese plan of operations. So long as the units remained few in number and constant change of location was not required in order to avoid being spotted by the Japanese, the troops remained fairly well supplied with necessities in spite of the difficulty experienced by the air crew in identifying areas on which supply was to be dropped

3. For a detailed account of Wingate's expedition, see *The Reconquest of Burma*, Vol. I, by C.I.S. Historical Section, New Delhi.

due to dense jungle. Beyond the Irrawaddy, the problem of locating them became more difficult. Here the country was broad and open and jungles and hills did not obstruct the vision but this very trait presented another difficulty. The units had continually to change their location to evade the Japanese with the result that often when aircraft reached the spot fixed for dropping supplies it was found evacuated and contact with the units could not be established. Later, when on their way back the force was divided into small groups to escape observation, locating them from the air became more and more uncertain. Even if it were not so, the task of supplying all the dispersed units would have been beyond the competence of the few transport aircraft available for the purpose. When the wireless sets, valued above everything else as the only means of communication with the base, had, for one reason or another, to be abandoned and destroyed before they had outlived their usefulness, the units were left to their own resources and contact with them was, in spite of diligent search by aircraft, entirely fortuitous. The result was that the Chindits had to bear untold hardships when the air supply scheme broke down. The planners had failed to visualise the difficulty of co-ordination between an inadequate air strength and a large number of dispersed ground groups which could not stick to their positions. The feasibility of air supply was, however, sufficiently demonstrated and there was no reason why, given certain conditions, it should not work in case ground lines of communication collapsed.

The main air support was provided by the Bengal Command Transport Squadron (No. 31) which was entrusted with the task of maintaining the entire expeditionary force by air. In 175 sorties a total of 90,000 miles was flown and the total weight of supplies dropped was 295.45 tons.⁴ On 28 April, a Dakota of 31 Squadron landed 34 miles north-east of Kantha on a strip hastily improvised by a returning unit in a jungle clearing and evacuated seventeen sick and wounded personnel.

It was when increasing difficulty was being experienced in following the movements of the various withdrawing units that a detachment of No. 2 Squadron I.A.F. was sent from Ranchi to Imphal. Seven Hurricanes reached Imphal by 13 April and commenced operations on the 15th. The chief task of the pilots was reconnaissance over the scattered groups of Chindits. It consisted mainly in pinpointing their positions and then returning to the base to lead the supply-dropping Dakotas to the appointed spot. It often involved flying just above ground level, as otherwise observation was impossible in the dense jungle, especially as the Chindits dared not show themselves too openly for fear of being discovered by the

4. Air Chief Marshal Sir R.E.C. Peirse's Despatch—for the period 1-1-43—30-6-1943. p. 9.

Japanese patrols which were never far off. The Hurricane was not a long distance flier and the Chindit groups were beyond its range. The Hurricanes were therefore fitted with extra fuel tanks to enable them to stay longer in the air. The average duration of the sorties flown by them varied from 3 to 3½ hours. The detachment remained in operation until 26 May after which it was withdrawn. In the course of these 41 days the pilots flew a total of 148 sorties out of which 70 were contact, 60 tactical, 15 photographic, 2 offensive, and 1 escort reconnaissances. It will thus be seen that though contact reconnaissance was their main task, the pilots carried out other jobs also. They strafed river craft and traffic on the Chindwin and Irrawaddy rivers, and trains on the Mandalay-Myitkyina railway and attacked Japanese ground troops and motor transport on the Kabaw Valley road. In the course of one of these sorties, a pilot flying over the Chindwin successfully attacked a small Japanese patrol and saved a wounded Gurkha soldier who was lying helpless on the river bank nearby. On 26 May the detachment left Imphal after being relieved by a detachment of No. 28 Squadron R.A.F.⁵

5. Air Chief Marshal Sir R.E. C. Peirse's Despatch on Air Operations 21 June 1943—15 November 1943. p. 66.

CHAPTER XI

THE SECOND ARAKAN CAMPAIGN

The advent of the next campaigning season in 1943 coincided with the opening in Delhi of the South-East Asia Command on 1 November 1943 under Admiral the Lord Louis Mountbatten, G.C.V.O., C.B., D.S.O., A.D.C. as the Supreme Allied Commander. The responsibility for operations in the eastern theatre passed from the Commander-in-Chief in India to the Supreme Allied Commander on 16 November. Air Chief Marshal Sir Richard Peirse, who was Chief of the R.A.F. India Command, was transferred to S.E.A.C. and took charge of the Air Command South-East Asia (A.C.S.E.A.) which comprised one Netherlands squadron and all British Empire air forces with the exception of a few Indian Air Force squadrons which were engaged in the defence of the North-West Frontier and came under A.O.C. India. The 10th U.S.A.A.F. also came under A.C.S.E.A. from 14 December.

To ensure the integrated operational control of the units in Bengal and Assam a new command, designated the Eastern Air Command, was set up under Maj.-Gen. G.F. Stratemeyer, U.S.A.A.F. The command included all R.A.F. and U.S.A.A.F. operational units in the area, coterminous with the former Bengal Command. The Air Forces under the Eastern Air Command were subdivided into four formations—a Tactical Air Force under A/M Sir John Baldwin, a Strategic Air Force under Brig.-Gen. Howard C. Davidson, U.S.A.A.F., a Troop Carrier Command (formed on 15 December 1943) under Brig.-Gen. D. Old, U.S.A.A.F. and a Photographic Reconnaissance Force under Wing Commander S.G. Wise. Though the entity of the U.S. Groups¹ and R.A.F. Wings was retained, each formation contained both R.A.F. and U.S.A.A.F. components. Staff at Headquarters, E.A.C., as well as the four formations were drawn from both the air forces and this integration on the staff side was reflected also in the tactical operations of the air forces.

There was a total of 48 R.A.F. and 17 U.S.A.A.F. operational squadrons with an effective strength of 723 aircraft (519 British and 204 American) on 16 November 1943. These were divided among the three major fronts—224 Group R.A.F. in Arakan, 221 Group R.A.F. in Assam, and the Northern Air Sector Force U.S.A.A.F. on the N.C.A.C. front in Northern Burma. As the months wore on, the air force received further reinforcements so that by May 1944 the corresponding figures were 64 and 28 squadrons. The Japanese

1. U.S. Group is equivalent to R.A.F. Wing.

had a force of approximately 250 aircraft² based on the airfields at Heho, Ani-sakan, Rangoon and Chiangmai with more at rear bases in Siam and the Netherlands East Indies.

The numerical preponderance of the combined air forces was largely offset by their dispersion over the huge battle area. The land front extended from Ledo area in the north, where the Chinese-American Forces under the command of General Stilwell were moving towards Myitkyina, to Arakan in the south. Besides providing support for the troops operating in these areas, the air forces were also to drop and then maintain Wingate's Long Range Penetration Group in the interior of Burma. The air defence of Calcutta and the adjacent industrial areas and the air fields was to be ensured. Above all, they were to conduct strategic air offensive against various targets with the object of maintaining air superiority and dislocating Japanese war effort. There was another consideration to be taken into account. Though modern types of aircraft were flowing in increasing numbers, the Hurricanes which formed the bulk of the fighting strength "were no real match for the Japanese Zeros except at high altitudes."³

Air superiority was a vital necessity in the attainment of which both bombers and fighters played their part. The Bomber effort was directed to immobilise the Japanese Air Force by the destruction of its airfield installations and supplies. Oil installations at Yenangyaung, Chauk, Lanywa, and Thilawa received particular attention from the bombers. The fighters were employed to intercept the Japanese aircraft on their way to India to attack important targets in the rear or forward areas, or in the process of hindering the operations of the Allied aircraft, specially those engaged in dropping supplies to the stranded troops during the Arakan and Imphal operations. Besides, the long range fighters were employed to destroy Japanese aircraft on the ground.

The advent of Spitfires early in November 1943 led to a marked increase in successful interceptions. During this month two Spitfire squadrons based at Chittagong destroyed four Japanese photographic reconnaissance aircraft (already referred to) of the Dinah type. Japanese attempts to destroy these new arrivals were unsuccessful, and by the end of December the Japanese had lost 22 fighters, probably lost 7 and suffered damage to 26 against the Allied loss of 13 only. But the Spitfire strength was not adequate for giving cover to all the important targets and the Japanese were able to score some success when the slower moving Hurricanes alone opposed them. By January 1944, two more squadrons of Spitfires were received and so there were four squadrons of Spitfires in the forward areas of Bengal besides nine squadrons of Hurricanes for fighter operations. During

2. 287 according to Mountbatten's Report on Campaign in Burma, 1943-1945, H.M.S. Office, 1951.

3. Ibid, p. 28.

January further losses were inflicted on the Japanese fighters over Arakan, the ratio of Japanese and R.A.F. casualties being eight to one. As a result, by the time land operations were started the Allies were able to achieve air superiority.

At the close of the monsoon in 1943, the Allied troops were prepared to take the offensive. The Fourteenth Army which had been formed in October 1943, and included XV Corps in Arakan and IV Corps in Assam and General Stilwell's Chinese-American forces in the Ledo area, were commissioned to secure all the frontiers of Bengal and Assam, advance in Arakan up to and inclusive of the Maungdaw-Buthidaung road and occupy North Burma up to the Mogaung-Myitkyina area, the emphasis being placed on the last. In order to accomplish the tasks it was decided that General Stilwell's forces would advance from Ledo towards Mogaung-Myitkyina. The 3rd Indian Division (Wingate's Force) would be flown into the Rail Indaw⁴ area to cut the main Japanese communications with the object of preventing reinforcements and supplies from going to the Japanese *18th Division* in the north. In Assam, IV Corps consisting of the 17th, 23rd and 20th Indian Divisions would keep the main Japanese forces occupied. In Arakan, XV Corps consisting of the 6th and 7th Indian Divisions would advance on Maungdaw-Buthidaung while the 81st West African Division would be deployed in the Kaladan valley to protect the left wing of the Corps against expected Japanese counter-attacks.

The Allies had one great advantage over the Japanese—air superiority. Air superiority could be used to move supplies and troops by air—an advantage now denied to the Japanese. Throughout the big battles—first in Arakan and then in Manipur and around Myitkyina—fullest use was made of air power in aid of the ground troops. There were, however certain difficulties in the way of the effective use of air power. As has already been pointed out, the densely-wooded country made recognition of targets a problem. Secondly, the Japanese skill in camouflaging their positions and dumps increased the difficulty of locating them from the air or the ground. Even when their position was located, the Japanese system of underground shelters ranging from shallow fox-holes to elaborate bunkers rendered them inviolable except by direct hits with heavy bombs. Nonetheless as the air crew came to have more and more intimate knowledge of the country, they gradually overcame the difficulty imposed by the nature of the terrain and skilful camouflage. Recognition of targets was also aided by smoke shells fired from the ground. When the Japanese started firing diversionary smoke shells to mislead the attacking aircraft, employment of coloured smoke was considered necessary. Yet bunkers were a more difficult proposition

4. As there are two Indaws in Burma, one is referred to as Rail Indaw, and the other as Oil Indaw.

to deal with. Apart from the fact that a most thorough and careful reconnaissance could not locate all the camouflaged bunkers, it was difficult to dislodge the Japanese from even the known bunker positions. "The problem presented by the strength and depth of many of the enemy's bunker positions was never properly solved."⁵ Sometimes, even after methodical hammering by the artillery and saturation by bombs, the Japanese bunker system was found substantially intact. The light bombers and fighter-bombers did little damage unless they made direct hits. Heavy and medium bombers might deliver a greater weight of bombs but effective assault on the target by the ground forces in co-operation with them was not feasible. The heavy and medium bombers have a greater margin of bombing error which makes it necessary for the ground forces to remain at a greater distance from the target than is the case with light bombers and fighter-bombers, and, as a result, by the time the army marched to deliver its attack, the defenders were able to emerge from the depths of their shelters and take their positions. However, the technique of air attack was determined by the nature of the country. Where, due to thick jungle, a target could be recognised by reference to its surroundings only from a height, dive bombing was used. When the location of the targets presented no difficulty, low level attacks were carried out.

From the opening of the campaigning season till February 1944, when the Japanese launched their offensive in Arakan, the air effort was directed first against the Japanese positions and other objectives and then in support of the Army's advance. In Arakan XV Corps had begun to advance immediately after the monsoon, from their positions covering Cox's Bazar against the forward positions of the Japanese *55th Division* on the Mayu Peninsula. The object was to secure the Maungdaw-Buthidaung road. The road tunnelled the Mayu range and was a vital artery of communication from one side of it to the other. The Japanese had fortified the tunnel area and had built up two strong positions on either side of the range—Razabil, three miles east of Maungdaw, and Letwedet, about the same distance west of Buthidaung. The 5th Indian Division moved towards Maungdaw to the west of the Mayu range while the 7th Indian Division advanced towards Buthidaung in the east. The 81st West African Division marched down the Kaladan valley from Daletme to protect the left flank (at the end of January 1944).

The early advances did not meet with much opposition. Maungdaw fell on 8 January 1944⁶. But, as the 5th Indian Division approached Razabil, resistance stiffened. The first strong point took a week's hard fighting to capture. Another hill feature named "Tortoise" in the rear of Razabil succumbed only after intense air and ground effort. But even at the end of January,

5. R.E.C. Peirse's Despatch, on Air operations, 16 Nov. 43-31 May 44.

6. 9 according to Mountbatten in his Report, p. 41.

Razabil itself held out. The 7th Indian Division on the other side had also made some progress until halted near Buthidaung. The 81st West African Division captured Kyauktaw by 3 March and was advancing on Apaukwa when a Japanese counter-offensive developed and the West Africans withdrew to a position south of Kaladan village. Thereafter the division continued its role of flank protection in the Paletwa area. Air support was provided during the approach towards the Maungdaw-Buthidaung road. The army's advance was preceded by intensive dive-bombing of the Japanese strong points. At times even the Strategic Air Force was called upon to participate in direct support bombing to clear a particularly stubborn point.

No. 6 Squadron of the I.A.F. arrived at Cox's Bazar at the end of November 1943 and saw continuous service till June 1944 when it was withdrawn from operations. It was equipped with Hurricanes and operated as a fighter-reconnaissance squadron serving as "the eyes of the 14th Army". The aircraft went out in pairs. The leading plane known as "The leader" undertook the reconnaissance while the other called "The Weaver" protected its tail. If disaster should befall either of the planes, the other would bring back the details.

No. 6 was followed into battle, about the middle of December 1943, by No. 8 Squadron I.A.F. flying Vengeance dive-bombers. The squadron was based at Double Moorings, a new kutchha strip three miles from Chittagong, and started operations on the 15th. At the start of the campaign, all the dive-bombing was done by No. 8 Squadron and No. 82 R.A.F. Squadron. Later other R.A.F. dive-bombing squadrons arrived in this theatre, and No. 8 moved to Joari strip on 22 January 1944.

No. 6 Squadron had opened its operational tour with two sorties on 30 November. The beginning was auspicious as one of the pilots spotted a group of Japanese troops south of Buthidaung, and this led to a successful strafing of the Japanese by six Hurricanes of the squadron. The squadron continued its work throughout December and by the last day of the month completed over 350 hours of operational flying (in less than 25 days). The work included tactical reconnaissance, message dropping, contact reconnaissance and strafing. On 12 December a Japanese steamer was attacked near Buthidaung. The squadron operated in the Arakan area covering Maungdaw-Razabil-Indin area on the coast, Buthidaung-Rathedaung area in the Mayu valley and Daletme-Paletwa-Kaladan area in the Kaladan valley.

While the Hurricanes were busy on reconnaissance duty in these areas ahead of the three main bodies of troops—in the Kaladan valley, and on the east and west sides of the Mayu range,—the Vengeances of No. 8 Squadron bombed supply dumps and suspected

Japanese headquarters. The aircraft usually flew in groups of six. They dived at a speed of about 300 miles per hour up to about 2,000 feet from ground and released their bombs. During December, calls for direct support of the army were not many and so the Vengeances directed their attention to targets behind the forward line. The first raid was delivered on 15 December on the Japanese communication line at Apaukwa on the Kaladan river near Kanzauk. On the following days supply dumps at Thaungdara, Pauktawgyi, east of Rathedaung and Kyaukchaung, south-east of Rathedaung, Laungchaung, north-east of Donbaik, Zadidaung, south-east of Buthidaung, suspected Japanese headquarters at Kangyibyin, near Baguna, and Japanese positions and buildings at Aungya north of Kyauktaw and Kyauktaw were subjected to successful bombing. The first raid in support of the army took place in the afternoon of 28 December when a Japanese position north-east of Maungdaw was bombed. Reports received from the army later indicated that the raid was successful. In December, 73 operational sorties were flown. As the army approached the Japanese defensive positions covering Maungdaw and Buthidaung, calls for direct support increased. More than once the two Vengeance squadrons—No. 82 R.A.F. and No. 8 I.A.F.—mounted nearly fifty sorties between them in a day.

In the course of January, No. 8 Squadron flew 217 successful sorties totalling 354 hours 26 minutes. The Japanese supply dumps received some attention. On the 30th a new Japanese landing ground at Myohaung was bombed. But most of the sorties were concentrated in the Razabil and Letwedet areas where the Japanese, securely entrenched in well-defended hill features, were barring the advance of the army. Time and again the squadron pilots either by themselves or jointly with other squadrons bombed the positions indicated by the ground forces. The bombing was generally satisfactory and the accuracy of the same was testified by the army on many occasions. But the bombing, though accurate, did not always produce the desired result. It had little effect on the entrenched Japanese. A case in point was the bombing of some Japanese positions in the Razabil area on the 26th. In view of the toughness of the Japanese underground defences, the Strategic Air Force was called upon to lend its weight and the attack was carried out by 16 American Liberators (B 24), and 10 Mitchells (B 25) besides 24 R.A.F. and I.A.F. Vengeances. The majority of the bombs fell in the area ; 50% of the Liberator, 70% of the Mitchell and 100% of the Vengeance effort found their mark. The total bomb load was nearly 145,250 pounds. But again, the bombing did not materially help the capture of the position. For one thing, the area of attack—1,000 yards by 600 yards—was too large for the weight of the bombs to be effective ; secondly, the Japanese dug-outs which were later found to be thirty feet underground were too deep to be much affected even

by the combined bombardment by the artillery, tank guns and bombers. The defenders suffered no appreciable or lasting damage. The bombers' failure to decide the issue demonstrated their limitations under such circumstances. And thirdly, there was an appreciable time lag between the bombing from the air and the assault by the army. The interval allowed the Japanese to take up their positions to meet the assaulting infantry.

On 3 February began the expected Japanese counter-offensive designed to cut off and "annihilate" the 5th and 7th Indian Divisions. The onslaught was as bold in its conception as it was swift in its execution. One task force under Colonel Tanahashi evaded the Allied tactical air reconnaissance, and captured Taung Bazar in the rear of the 7th Division. It then overran the headquarters which moved with great difficulty to the corps administrative box at Sinzweya, four miles south-west. Another Japanese group crossed the Mayu range and blocked the road linking Maungdaw and Bawli Bazar at Maunghmana, thus cutting the land communications of the 5th Indian Division. By 8 February both the divisions were cut off. The Japanese had provided the most impressive measure of air support in this area so far, sweeps by formations of 60 plus aircraft being reported daily. The task of their air force was to attack the Allied positions and forward bases, prevent the Allied aircraft from rendering direct support to their ground forces, and above all to intercept the supply-dropping aircraft and prevent the flow of supplies to the encircled divisions.

The army was however not caught napping. Such a situation had already been visualized and steps had been taken to meet it. The 26th Indian Division at Chittagong and the 36th British Division at Calcutta were to come to the relief of the besieged forces. Supplies and transport aircraft had been placed in readiness and orders had been issued that any formation or unit cut off would "hold fast". The air supply began without delay and continued throughout without any hitch. The 5th Indian Division was supplied by air and sea while the 7th Indian Division depended entirely on air supply. During the critical period from 8 February to 6 March, 2,010 short tons⁷ of supplies of all kinds including rations, animals, ammunition and oil were dropped. The Japanese aircraft made an all-out effort to hinder this air supply and fighters were sent in large numbers over the battle area with that object. They failed in the task because the Allied air forces increased their fighter escort for the supply aircraft and much of the supply-dropping was done by night. Throughout the Arakan operations the only loss sustained by transport aircraft was one Dakota shot down although many others were damaged by fire from the ground. Besides air supply which was the key to the Allied success in the Arakan operations, the air force rendered other valuable

7. A short ton is equal to 2,000 lbs.

services. The Japanese aircraft were kept subdued by the fighters, the Spitfire squadrons (three squadrons of Spit Vs and a few Spit VIIIs) making the largest contribution. To counter the Spifires, the Japanese brought in the Tojo aircraft whose performance was superior to that of the Oscar. They also improved their tactics. They used decoy aircraft to draw the R.A.F. while their camouflaged fighters flying above attacked the Spifires. They adopted the defensive circle formation in combat and split into small groups when the circle was broken. By these means they were able to reduce their own casualties and to increase the losses of the Spifires. Nevertheless, during the first thirteen days of the Japanese offensive, 65 Japanese aircraft were destroyed, probably destroyed and damaged for the loss of only three Spifires.⁸ The Strategic Air Force lent its weight against tactical targets and the close-support squadrons broke up many attacks and maintained a constant harassing of the Japanese lines of communication. Further, hundreds of wounded soldiers were withdrawn from the besieged areas to safer areas from a number of strips hastily constructed in the battle zone, by a couple of Fox Moths.

During this crucial period No. 6 Squadron worked at top pressure, many of the pilots flying three sorties a day. Up to 3 February they were based at Cox's Bazar after which they operated from Ratnap strip. During the first fortnight of February the squadron flew 193 sorties. While reconnaissance for the purpose of ascertaining Japanese movements and locating their gun positions was the main task, the pilots attacked rivercraft, Japanese troops and huts whenever sighted. In this way they destroyed many Japanese boats in the Htizwe, Buthidaung, Kyauktaw, Kwazon and Rathedaung areas and accounted for quite a number of Japanese soldiers. On 7 February the squadron located anti-aircraft gun positions in Buthidaung area which were then strafed by Spifires. On one occasion one of the pilots saved some Allied troops from walking into a Japanese ambush. While out on a reconnaissance over the Taung Bazar area, the pilot observed about thirty of own troops approaching a grove of trees where he had a short while earlier noticed about fifty Japanese soldiers. The approaching troops were unaware of the presence of hostile troops in the vicinity and had their rifles slung on their shoulders. Immediate action was called for to warn the soldiers against the impending danger but shooting was not permitted in this area as it was very close to the Allied lines. The pilot flew over to the 7th Indian Division headquarters and dropped a message asking for permission to shoot. Without waiting for the permission to reach him, as that might have been too late, he flew back to the spot and at the risk of being court-martialled for disobedience of orders, and opened fire at the Japanese. About ten Japanese were killed and his own troops were saved.

8. Mountbatten's Report, p. 58.

During this period the Japanese Air Force was active, and unescorted flying by Hurricanes was fraught with danger. The slower Hurricane, once spotted, had little chance of escape from the faster and better manoeuvrable Japanese fighters. Between 4 and 16 February the squadron lost four pilots and five aircraft due to hostile action. Only one pilot succeeded in evading his pursuers. On 4 February two aircraft out on reconnaissance over Taung Bazar were attacked by hostile aircraft and one was shot down but the other got down as low as possible in an attempt to throw off the pursuers by twisting and turning among the trees and hills. The attacking fighters could not fully exploit their advantage in speed due to the danger involved. They failed to hit his aircraft and finally gave up the chase. Apart from the element of luck, only the level-headed resourcefulness of the pilot made the escape possible.

During the critical days of February, No. 8 Squadron was in continuous action except when heavy rains made the strip unserviceable. During the peak period of Japanese fighter activity the Vengeances were, in view of the danger of interception, escorted by Spitfires or Hurricanes to their targets but later, as the danger from hostile aircraft lessened, they operated without the protection of fighters. The Japanese ground troops moved mainly under the cover of darkness and they were adept in the art of camouflage. Very seldom was therefore any activity noticed in the target area. The squadron aircraft however carried out the tasks assigned to them and subsequent reports showed that these bombings of apparently harmless targets had proved very useful.

Until 3 February the squadron's effort was directed against Japanese defences. But when the Japanese plan of encircling the 5th and the 7th Indian Divisions unfolded itself, operations calculated to upset it and break their stranglehold round the Allied troops assumed prime importance. The squadron was commissioned to bomb supply dumps and vital centres in the Japanese lines of communication in order to prevent the flow of supplies and reinforcements to the Japanese forward troops and to attack important points in the Japanese ring round Sinzweya and on the Maungdaw-Buthidaung road. As part of the former, they bombed positions east of Buthidaung (5th), points on the track leading from Seinnyinbya to Buthidaung in the north including Baguna (10th), buildings at Lammadaw near Kyauktaw, important posts on the road between Rathedaung and Buthidaung including Kindaung (10th), and Thaungdara (16th) and supply dumps south-east and south-west of Buthidaung. As part of the latter, they bombed the village Bogyigyaung, south of Taung Bazar on the 11th, and Japanese positions round Sinzweya on the 13th, 18th, 20th and 22nd. Important points on the Maungdaw-Buthidaung road area were visited on the 18th, 20th, 24th and 26th. Such was the demand for the squadron's

services that sometimes as many as four calls were received from the army during one day (20th). Even on the day (18th) the squadron moved to Mambur airfield on account of the Joari strip having being worn out, the squadron flew no less than twenty-four sorties. There were occasional hangups of bombs, sometimes bombs overshot the mark and a few aircraft had to return from their sorties early without dropping their bombs due to some technical trouble.

The battle of the Administrative Box at Sinzweya was a bitter one but in spite of determined attacks the defenders held out. This unexpected resistance upset all the calculations of the Japanese who had made no administrative arrangements for a long campaign. The Japanese troops had brought only ten days' supplies of food and ammunition. When the initial plan failed, they tried to remedy the situation but the unceasing attacks on their supply lines from the sea and from the air made these attempts unsuccessful. Moreover, the Allied air supremacy made the movement of troops and supplies by day difficult. As a result, by the second week in February, the troops began to run short of supply. In the meantime the 26th Indian Division advanced from Chittagong to the relief of the besieged troops. It reopened the coastal road and when the 36th Division followed in its wake it took position on the eastern side of the Mayu range. The Japanese now were themselves encircled and suffered heavy casualties from the continuous attacks by bombers, artillery and tank guns. The siege of the Administrative Box was broken when the 7th Indian Division linked up with the 5th Indian Division advancing through Ngakyedauk Pass, on the morning of 23 February. Thereafter the Allies gradually assumed the offensive but against determined Japanese defence the progress was slow. Buthidaung was captured on 9 March, and Razabil was taken on the 15th but the Maungdaw-Buthidaung road could not be seized until April.

In the meantime the Japanese had begun their invasion of Manipur. IV Corps needed immediate reinforcements and so the 5th Indian Division was flown from the Arakan front to the Imphal area in the middle of March to be followed later by the 7th Indian Division. Though the 25th and 26th Indian Divisions took the places vacated by them, any offensive on a large scale was out of the question, as all available transport aircraft were withdrawn from service in this area and the main air strength was needed on the IV Corps front. But local actions continued till the advent of the monsoon when the forward line was established along the tunnels. It is proposed here to carry the story of this front till the monsoon imposed a stalemate. Fighting to improve the Allied positions in Arakan continued throughout April against strong opposition. In the first week of May, the Allied troops withdrew from Buthidaung to positions more suitable for the monsoon, XV Corps taking up the general line Godusara-Tunnels area—Taung Bazar. The 81st West African

Division, less one battalion left at Paletwa, took its position east of the Kalapanzin river in April to provide closer protection to the left flank of XV Corps. Subsequently it was withdrawn to the neighbourhood of Chiringa.

During this period of limited land offensive three I.A.F. squadrons, Nos. 6, 8 and 4, operated on this front. In March the work of No. 6 Squadron centred mainly round Buthidaung area which was the scene of much ground activity. The battle for Buthidaung opened on 7 March and ended with its capture two days later. During these three days the resources of No. 6 Squadron were strained to the utmost. Pilots were airborne early in the morning and carried on continuous tactical and photographic reconnaissance till the evening. They maintained constant touch with the main body of the attacking troops and communicated to Army Headquarters minute details of the battle. They observed Japanese gun positions and movements at Buthidaung itself. In three days the squadron flew 59 sorties over the area, each pilot doing at least three sorties a day. Thousands of photographs were taken, printed and delivered to Army Headquarters and to the forward troops. Places visited included Baguna, south of Buthidaung, Godusara farther to the south-west, Kwazon, Htizwe and Kanzauk. Courses of the Pi-Chaung and the Kaladan river were also searched. Occasionally the pilots covered places further afield viz, Thayettabin, east of Kyauktaw and Kokpedaung-Teinnyo area south of Thayettabin. Positions of Japanese troops and movement of river-craft were observed and strafing was carried out.

In April the squadron put in 620 hours of operational flying. During this month the Kaladan and Mayu valleys received increased attention. Rivercraft and trenches were strafed with good results. Contact was established with own forward troops south of Buthidaung on the 21st. On the 25th letters were dropped at Paletwa for Allied troops. On the 27th photographs were dropped on these troops near Kaladan. In May, the advent of the monsoon restricted operational flying and the squadron's total came to $472\frac{3}{4}$ hours only. The aircraft ranged over the whole Arakan front. Boats and sampans on the Kaladan river, Sainding Chaung and Pi-Chaung were attacked and sunk ; bashas inhabited by the Japanese strafed ; and Japanese troops located at Kagyabet, Palaung and other places. On 27 May, the squadron moved from Ratnap airstrip to the all-weather airfield at Cox's Bazar. At the beginning of June, it was withdrawn from operations, the air party leaving on the 11th, and its place was taken by No. 4 Squadron.

During the same period No. 8 Squadron I.A.F. gave direct support to the ground forces by dive-bombing various targets. In March they flew 222 operational sorties totalling more than 235 hours. Most of these sorties were flown in the Buthidaung area.

An IAF pilot climbs into his aircraft preparatory to taking off on a sortie over enemy occupied territory



After being briefed, this Vultee Vengeance crew hasten to their aircraft

Loading a bomber: Sgt. Das Gupta and Air Cpl. Hussain busy with their jobs



Sqn. Ldr. Januja and Sqn. Ldr. Arjan Singh, D.F.C.

The targets included Japanese fox-holes, supply stores and gun positions. The bombing was generally accurate and produced satisfactory results. The bombing of a Japanese gun position on a hill feature (Pt 1301) on the 19th may be cited as an instance. The guns were commanding the line of advance of the Allied troops and the squadron was asked to deal with them. The target called for very accurate bombing as the Allied troops were barely two hundred yards away. Six aircraft detailed for the task dropped 6,000 lbs. of bombs. Two of the pilots scored direct hits, the others dropping their loads within thirty yards of the position. The gun position was completely destroyed and the resistance was broken. The squadron aircraft also operated in the neighbourhood of Kyauktaw and paid several visits to the Kaldan area. The village of Lammadaw on the Kaladan river, Pagoda Hill near Kyauktaw, Kaladan village and Japanese positions south-west of it, were some of the targets attacked. On the 20th was carried out a very successful operation against Japanese gun positions about midway between Kyauktaw and Kaladan. A direct hit was scored on a position from where guns were firing on a landing strip nearby and were holding up evacuation of casualties by air. The squadron's bombing helped the ground forces to clear the position. In the course of another successful raid on the following day in the same area three guns were destroyed.

April saw an increase in the number of sorties—a total of 277 involving 338 hours being flown. Actually the effort was greater than the increase in the number of sorties signifies. Up to April the aircraft carried a load of 1,000 lbs only—one 500-lb bomb under each wing. From April onward they began to carry 1,500 lbs. of bombs and this increased their effectiveness proportionately. The Buthidaung area occupied nearly the entire attention of the squadron. The places visited included Seinnyinbya, south of Buthidaung, Kanbyin near Baguna, Kindaung, south-east of Buthidaung, Zadidaung, north of Kwazon, Inbauk, and many hill positions. About the middle of April a new tactic was evolved to deal with the Japanese underground positions. Ground and aerial bombardment had, as has been noted, very little effect on the deep shelters underground. Its only effect was to drive the defenders to the farthest depth. The problem was how to keep them there till the attackers came near enough to deal with them. The answer was found. A well-fortified hill position, eight miles north-west of Buthidaung, was blocking the Allied advance. The Japanese had built shelters ten feet underground and it was difficult to dislodge them. A co-ordinated air and ground attack was planned in which No. 8 Squadron took part. A terrific artillery barrage lasting for two hours was followed by dive bombing of the target. The Vengeances came in batches of six in box formation and dropped their bombs. The last formation staged a dummy attack but the Japanese, unaware of this, remained hidden in their shelters. The

Allies, however, being in full possession of the plan, climbed the hill and were able to surprise the Japanese in their shelters. Many casualties were inflicted and the position was taken. This tactic became the pattern of many subsequent actions.

Another way of achieving the same objective was to use delayed action bombs. Since May, the squadron, at army's request, began to use such bombs with varying fuses—eleven second, six hours and twelve hours—to meet the circumstances of each case. Japanese concentrations south and south-east of Buthidaung were bombed, supply dumps in the same area were attacked and several visits were paid to the Godusara and Baguna areas. On 16 April occurred the first operational casualty since the squadron came into operation in this area. One pilot failed to pull out of his dive, for reasons unknown, and the aircraft hit the ground and both the pilot and his air gunner were killed. From 22 May, for some days, the squadron stood down from operations on account of its move from Mambur. Its new base was to be Chiringa. The advance party moved there but as the air-field was not completely ready, the air party remained at Mambur. During these days and for the whole of June the squadron remained dispersed on account of the uncertainty as to their location and this naturally had an adverse effect on the operational output. About the middle of June, a detachment of the squadron moved to Cox's Bazar and started operations from there on the 21st after a break of one month. From this day to 7 July, the last day of operations for the squadron in this theatre, its activity was very limited on account of monsoon conditions. The weather was for the most part unsuitable for dive-bombing and in their attacks the pilots flew low and dropped eleven-second delayed action bombs. In June the limited effort was spread over a wide area, the targets including the jetty at Buthidaung, a school building in village Khaundomh north-west of Thayettabin, the water-front at Ponnagyon on the west bank of the Kaladan river near its mouth and a pagoda at Rathedaung, which was used for military purposes by the Japanese. In July the squadron visited Ateutnageth, Htizwe, north of Rathedaung, and Satpaung, south-west of Daletme, besides Buthidaung and Rathedaung. After 7 July, the squadron took no part in operations as orders for its withdrawal had been issued. The squadron started its move on the 9th, the air party leaving on the 16th.

While Nos. 6 and 8 Squadrons saw action through the various phases of the Arakan Campaign, two other squadrons came for operations in this area after the crisis was past. No. 9 Squadron, first based at Kulaura and then at Comilla and Singerbil, operated mainly in the Haka-Falam area but occasionally visited the Arakan front to carry out strafing work. Till August, it operated thus on two fronts but in September it moved to Chiringa and therefore concentrated its attention exclusively on the Arakan area.

The other I.A.F. squadron was No. 4. It came to Feni for operations in March, flying Hurricane IIc aircraft. The squadron did not, however, start operations till 15 April. In April the squadron flew 150 hours (149·30) in operations. The chief task was escorting. Allied ships were engaged in carrying supplies to the Allied troops on the west side of the Mayu range while Dakotas dropped supplies on the east side of it and in the Kaladan valley. The squadron aircraft operated in support of these missions. The squadron also carried out some strafing sorties, in Buthidaung area and attacked sampans in the Mayu and the Kaladan river.

In May, the nature of the work continued to be the same. The effort was however greater, more than 487 hours being flown. Escort duties predominated ; besides, quite a number of sorties were devoted to offensive reconnaissance. Bashas in Gyindaw area, northwest of Indin, at Dodan north of Hparabyin and in Labawa area, Japanese gun positions in Baguna area and near Taung Bazar and watercraft on the Mayu and the Kaladan rivers were the targets dealt with. At the beginning of June there was a temporary cessation of operations. The squadron's aircraft left on 3 June for Amarda Road for attending an armament practice course. On completion of the training it came back and took over the duties of No. 6 Squadron, which was withdrawn, at Cox's Bazar.

During the operations described above the Indian squadrons gave quite a good performance. No. 6 Squadron was the recipient of congratulatory messages from the units with which it had co-operated. Gen. Messervy and the 7th Indian Division sent their thanks for support given against the Japanese in Tara Ga area, particularly on 30 March when air action helped to complete the rout of the Japanese. Another message came from Brig. Peirse and Tank Detachments on 11 April expressing their gratitude for recent support especially fighter and photographic reconnaissance which materially assisted tank victories and reduced casualties. Maj. General Lomax, commander of the 26th Indian Division, sent a message on 13 April in appreciation of the effective air support given by the squadron during the last two days in Htinshabyin area. The squadron's photographic section turned out an average of 16,000 prints a month, the highest total produced in one day being 1,500 prints.

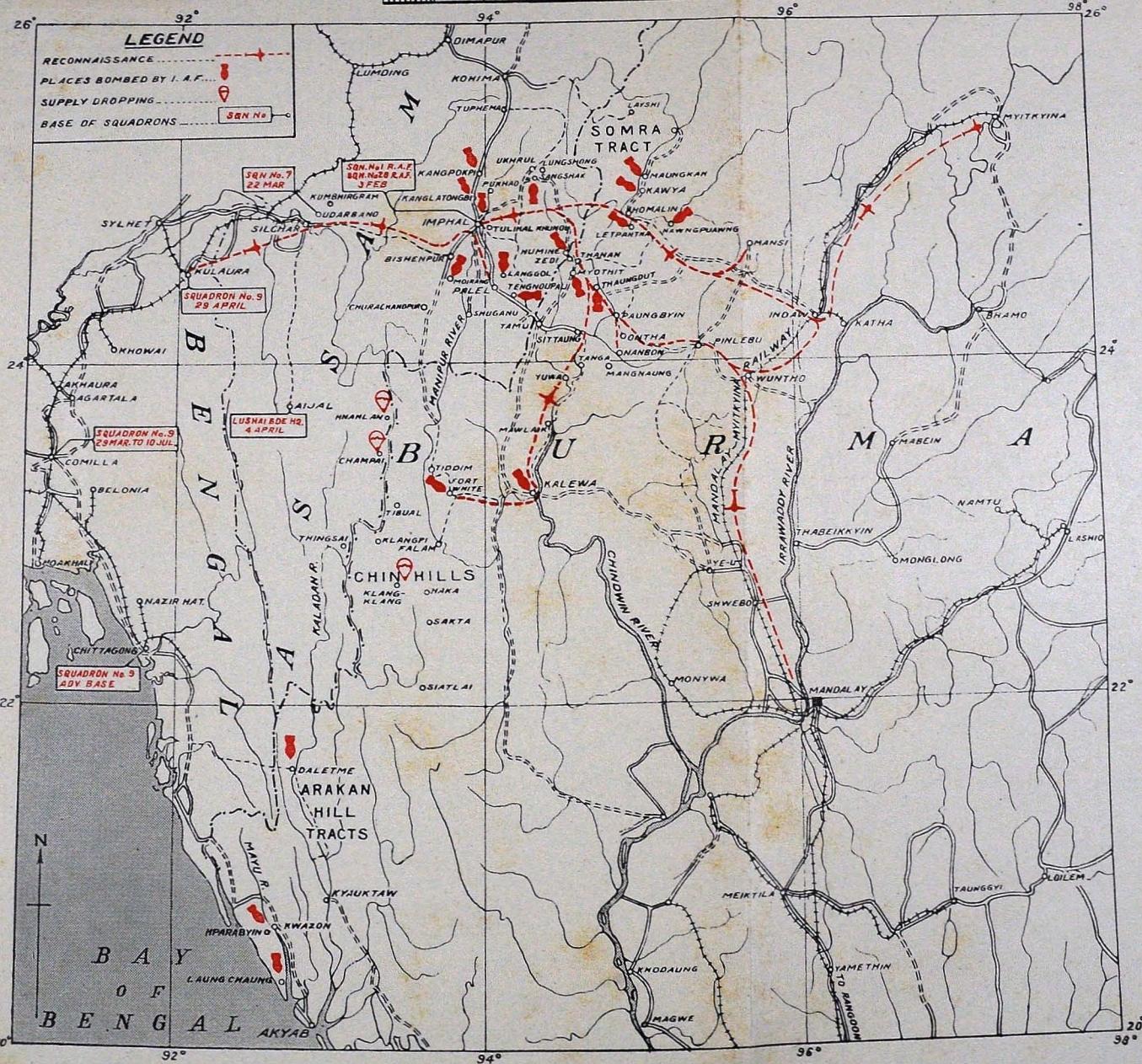
Two notable awards came to the pilots of the squadron in appreciation of the valuable work done by them. The commanding officer of the squadron S/Ldr. Mehar Singh received the D.S.O. The A.O.C. 3rd T.A.F. arrived in person on 15 March to present the coveted decoration. The next award came on 9 June, about the end of the squadron's tour of operations, when F/Lt. Rawal Singh was awarded the M.B.E.

No. 8 Squadron carried out 1420 sorties and dropped a total of 1,379,250 lbs. of bombs. The squadron was the recipient of many

congratulatory messages from the ground forces for its efficient work. Casualties were very low. The ground crew worked with remarkable efficiency. The engine of the Vengeance aircraft had, right from the beginning, shown a tendency to lose power and consume more than the stipulated amount of petrol. This had been cured by complete stripping of engines but the trouble continued to recur, causing a few accidents, and the ground staff had a very strenuous job in keeping the aircraft in flying condition. Such was the seriousness of the defects referred to above that in April alone there were thirteen replacements of aircraft and, in June, conversion to an improved type (Mark III) began.

BATTLE FOR IMPHAL AND KOHIMA
SHOWING I.A.F. OPERATIONS
FEBRUARY - AUGUST 1944

SCALE OF MILES
20 0 20 40 60 80 100



CHAPTER XII

BATTLE FOR IMPHAL AND KOHIMA

The Japanese attempt to "annihilate" the Allied troops in Arakan and then sweep into Bengal had failed. But they had an alternative and more ambitious plan of invading India for which they had long been preparing. This offensive which was intended to capture Imphal and Kohima as a prelude to breaking into the Brahmaputra valley, cutting the Bengal-Assam railway which was General Stilwell's line of communication and capturing the airfields on which the supply to China depended, commenced on 7-8 March. 100,000 crack Japanese troops were detailed for the task.

The Imphal plain which is about 600 square miles in area lies 3,000 feet up among the Manipur hills. Surrounded on all sides by mountains, the valley was difficult of access. It was approachable from the railhead at Dimapur, 138 miles away by a road which wound its way up the steep Kohima hills and then down into the valley. There was a mountain road from Imphal via Tamu to the Kabaw valley and another via Tiddim to the Chindwin. Besides, there were two tracks, one eastward to Ukhru and the other westward to Silchar via Bishenpur. In this plateau had been built up large depots, dumps, administrative establishments, hospitals and labour camps, as well as a couple of air-fields and four fighter strips. It was an invaluable base for the Allies and a coveted prize for the Japanese.

General Slim, commander of the Fourteenth Army, had already made plans to meet the Japanese offensive. Intelligence from all sources had informed him that the *33rd, 15th and 31st Divisions* of the Japanese army were poised for the offensive. General Slim decided to concentrate IV Corps in the Imphal area. To reinforce it and fight the decisive battle there the 20th Indian Division was to fall back from Tamu to the Palel area, the 17th Indian Division was to withdraw from Tiddim to Imphal and the 23rd Division to hold the Tiddim road some distance south of Imphal. Preparations were put in hand for bringing in reinforcements and for large scale air transportation and supply.

The Japanese offensive was launched a week earlier than expected. The 17th Indian Division was cut off before it could pull out of Tiddim by detachments of the Japanese *33rd Division*, which had established road blocks across the line of retreat and the 17th Indian Division had to fight its way through these blocks almost the whole distance of its march. This it did successfully by 7 April with the aid of the 23rd Indian Division which had been withdrawn from

Ukhrul area for this purpose. The 20th Indian Division carried out its withdrawal from Tamu to Imphal fighting delaying actions all the way and covered 167 miles of the road in three weeks. Columns of the Japanese *31st Division* overcame the gallant resistance offered by the 50th Indian Parachute Brigade at Ukhrul and captured it on 29th March. Meanwhile other elements of the *31st Division* pressed westward, established a road block on the Imphal-Kohima road on 29 March and then turned to the attack of Kohima. The Japanese *15th Division* at the same time cut the Ukhrul-Imphal road and turned south-west against Imphal.

On 4 April the Japanese opened their attack on Kohima. Contrary to expectations, the whole *31st Division* was brought against this area. There was a scratch garrison at Kohima which, though greatly outnumbered, put up a gallant resistance. It was gradually forced to withdraw into a smaller and smaller area but it held out grimly at Garrison Hill. Meanwhile relief had already been arranged for. The Headquarters of XXXIII Corps was rushed forward from India and started building up at Jorhat at the beginning of April. The 2nd British Division also began arriving at Dimapur about this time. The leading brigade of this division began advancing to the relief of Kohima on 10 April. On 20 April, the 6th Brigade of the 2nd British Division relieved the Kohima garrison. Kohima area itself was still in the hands of the Japanese who were fighting fiercely in the natural defensive positions afforded by the surrounding hills. Throughout May the Japanese were engaged in these positions and it was not until 6 June that the battle of Kohima was at an end.

IV Corps at Imphal had been completely encircled on 9 April when the Japanese *33rd Division* cut the Bishenpur track from Imphal to Silchar. At the end of April and early in May the Japanese made desperate attempts to force the Allied positions on the Tiddim and Tamu roads. But though they came sufficiently close to Imphal to cause considerable anxiety, their primary object was not attained. In the meantime in the north and north-east of Imphal the 5th and 23rd Indian Divisions had assumed offensive against the Japanese *15th Division* and by the end of April, the 5th Indian Division had reached a point ten miles from Imphal along the main road to Kohima and the 23rd Indian Division had advanced 23 miles from Imphal along the track to Ukhrul. In May the Allies engaged the Japanese in fierce battles. After the conclusion of the battle of Kohima in early June the opening of the Kohima-Imphal road became the primary objective and IV and XXXIII Corps began to advance towards each other along the road. In IV Corps area the 5th Indian Division retook Kanglatongbi by the first week of June. On 22 June, the 2nd British Division and the 5th Indian Division met 29 miles from Imphal and 109 miles from Dimapur and the Kohima-Imphal road was re-opened.

The Japanese had hoped that encirclement or the mere threat of it would produce quick results. But isolation and encirclement alone could not give them victory. As in Arakan, encirclement lost its sting in view of large scale air supply which was immediately set in motion. Arrangements had already been made to meet the situation that had arisen. Reinforcements to transport aircraft had been asked for. In March, 20 Commandos (C-46) were borrowed from the hump route for the fly-in of the 5th Indian Division. By the second week of April, 79 Aircraft from the Middle East were operating on the Burma front in addition to 8 Dakota squadrons (4 American, 4 British) already in Eastern Air Command, and the Commandos which had been loaned by the India-China wing of the Air Transport Command earlier for supply-dropping in Arakan.

Even with these reinforcements it was a stupendous task to meet the many and varied needs of the besieged forces. On 15 April the commitment for air supply to the garrison at Imphal was established at over 400 short tons per day. To fulfil this the air force needed fair weather and speedy loading of aircraft at supply bases. Neither of these conditions was entirely fulfilled. Moreover, the inadequacy of the landing facilities in the Imphal area prevented full use being made of the aircraft available. As a result "in spite of most gallant efforts, the Troop Carrier Command proved unable to put into Imphal more than about half of the Army's accepted demands."¹ Subsequently, however, when the whole action of the Troop Carrier Command and the 3rd T.A.F. was co-ordinated under the Command of Air Marshal Baldwin on 1 May and the ground elements of the air supply system were reorganised, the position improved appreciably and in June the target figure was reached and even surpassed.

The traffic was brisk and moved both ways. On their journey to Imphal area the aircraft flew in troops and supplies. The 50th Parachute Brigade was flown in from the Punjab to Imphal at the beginning of March and the 5th Indian Division from Arakan to the central front—two brigades to Imphal and the third to Dimapur by 27 March. The 7th Indian Division was also moved by air—two brigades to Dimapur and one to Imphal in the second week of April. Besides routine supplies and medical necessities, most varied articles were delivered to the forces. The encircled garrison at Kohima depended entirely on air supply. In its last post at the Garrison Hill, the garrison was successfully supplied from the air with food, water and ammunition, though to drop supplies in the dropping zone, which was very small in area, the aircraft had to fly at tree-top height. On their return journey the aircraft brought out casualties and persons not needed for active combat. The process of evacuation continued right up to the end of the battle, and by the end of June about 60,000 had been taken out. Thus the army was saved the embarrassment

1. Lt.-Gen. W. J. Slim, *Campaign of the Fourteenth Army, 1943-44*.

of having to feed so many additional mouths out of a precarious food stock. It fought bravely and well but here as earlier in Arakan, without the unremitting efforts of the transport squadrons of the U.S.A.A.F. and R.A.F. the position would have been untenable.

The smooth working of air transport operations was ensured by the Allied fighters which had established almost complete supremacy in the air in the battle of Arakan. Reference to this has been made earlier. When the battle moved to the Chindwin front, eight squadrons were moved to that area from 224 Group. Successful interception in this theatre was hampered chiefly on account of insufficient warning of the approach of hostile aircraft and lack of experienced pilots. Nevertheless between the opening of the Imphal battle and the end of May 1944, 31 Japanese aircraft were destroyed, 20 probably destroyed and 66 damaged in air combat over Manipur area for the loss of only seventeen Allied aircraft. This figure does not take into account the Japanese aircraft destroyed by American long-range aircraft either on the ground or in the air during their return to base after operations. When the advance of the Japanese led to the rolling up of the warning system in the forward areas, it was not possible for the Allied aircraft to be airborne in time to intercept the raiders before they had reached their target. If, however, they could not be prevented from carrying out their raids, their return could be hindered. United States Lightnings (P.38) and Mustangs (P.51), by intercepting them on their return journey, succeeded in inflicting appreciable damage on the raiders, destroying 81 aircraft in seven weeks.

Attack on the Japanese aircraft on the ground was another way of diminishing the Japanese scale of effort. The Japanese warning system was primitive and this enabled the British-American fighters to catch the Japanese aircraft on the ground. Even when there was an improvement in the Japanese warning system and their fighters could take to the air to meet the invaders, the American fighters could, by virtue of their superior speed, avoid them and attack aircraft on the ground. In this way in the course of March, April and May, 121 Japanese aircraft were destroyed, the majority of them on the ground and the remainder in the air. These losses forced the Japanese to abandon the Shwebo group of airfields and even Heho and Meiktila, and by the end of May their aircraft moved to the airfields around Rangoon which, though comparatively immune from Allied attacks, were too distant from the forward areas to enable their air force to provide effective support to their ground forces.

In spite of a dearth of suitable fighters, the continued effort of strategic bombers, Spitfires, and long-range American fighters thus succeeded in maintaining air superiority throughout this crucial period. This will be evident from the fact that the Japanese scale of effort (2,700 sorties) was less than three per cent of the Allied effort.

The Japanese high command had made plans for a short campaign. Speed was the key-note of their plan. Imphal and Kohima were to be captured before Allied reinforcements could arrive. Their troops were equipped lightly but the large stores built up by the Allies at Imphal would be at their disposal once it was captured. Imphal, however, did not fall as planned and the Japanese were confronted with the problem of logistics. Their supply could not keep pace with their requirements. Their line of communication through the jungle-clad hills, incapable of carrying necessary supplies in any case, collapsed under the weight of the Allied attacks. The motor road from Ye-U was the main line of supply for the Japanese troops in the Tiddim area while the troops attacking from east of Imphal depended on the road leading from Wuntho. By day and night these two vital arteries of the Japanese were subjected to attacks by the Strategic Air Force. Motor and animal transports, dumps, barracks and bridges were attacked and destroyed and landslides caused at vital points on the Tiddim road impeding transportation of troops and supplies. The disruption of traffic caused by these attacks was largely responsible for the constant shortage of material and reinforcements which hampered the Japanese effort during this entire campaign.

Besides, the Air Force gave substantial support to the ground forces during their operations. During the Japanese advance towards Imphal by the Tamu and Tiddim roads, and towards Kohima through the Somra Hills and from Homalin via Ukhral, air support to stem it was provided to the maximum extent possible. 4 Vengeances and 4 Hurribomber squadrons operated during this phase. In April the Hurribombers attacked Churachandpur area, Imphal-Tiddim road, the road block set up at Kanglatongbi on the Imphal-Kohima road, the Japanese troops on the Tamu-Palel road and the Japanese *31st Division* which was operating against Kohima. The four Vengeance squadrons attacked Japanese dumps and camps besides carrying direct support tasks.

In May direct support operations centered round Kohima and Vengeances and Hurribombers carried out intensive attacks against bunker positions and slit trenches, thus helping the army to clear Kohima and the surrounding hills from the Japanese. To the south of Imphal, concentrations of Japanese troops and vehicles were attacked by fighter-bombers and fighters and the Japanese efforts to deploy in the Imphal plain were decisively defeated by the Hurricanes and Vengeances. The Strategic Air Force was also pressed into service for direct support work.

As has already been said, the Japanese offensive against Imphal had been foreseen by the army authorities. A close watch on the Japanese movements was therefore considered a necessity and No. 1 Squadron IAF was brought from Kohat for this purpose. The

squadron reached Imphal on 3 February and remained in operation for the next fourteen months. With No. 28 RAF Squadron also based at Imphal it shared all the fighter reconnaissance work on this front.

No. 1 Squadron lost no time in commencing its allotted work, a series of sector reconnaissances being flown on the 5th. During February the squadron flew more than 60 sorties on offensive, tactical, photographic and sector reconnaissances. The main task was the observation of Japanese movements. In pursuance of this task it covered a wide area including Homalin, Yuwa, Mawlaik, Kalewa—all on the Chindwin, Fort White and Falam beyond Tiddim. The upper Chindwin area was marked for special observation. Occasionally the pilots went as far east as the Myitkyina-Mandalay railway and covered the road from Indaw to Homalin, and Paungbyin-Pinlebu-Wuntho area. Through these ran the Japanese lines of communication and discovery of heavy traffic on them was to be a warning of the Japanese intentions. Much valuable information was obtained by the pilots as a result of their reconnaissance.

Before the Japanese offensive against Imphal started on 8 March attention was mainly confined to the lines of communication east of the Chindwin *viz.*, Pinlebu-Hpaunzeik, Paungbyin-Wetkauk-Homalin-Nawngpuaung, Paungbyin-Tanga-Maingnvaung-Nanbon-Ontha, Mansi-Tonbon-Leo, etc. Information was brought as to whether bridges along the various roads were serviceable and whether the roads and tracks showed signs of being used. Bashas, elephants, sampans and cattle were strafed on many occasions. After 8 March reconnaissance over the areas through which the Japanese were advancing was the principal task. The Japanese were then trying to cut off the 17th Indian Division by establishing road blocks on the Tiddim road along which it was retreating to Imphal. No. 1 Squadron's task was to locate the position of the retreating troops and of mechanical transport from day to day, drop mail near the divisional headquarters at milestone 126 and keep an eye on the tracks leading from the Tiddim road for signs of Japanese movement. In the area north-east of Imphal the advance of Japanese *15th and 31st Divisions* required careful watching. Thaungdut-Sedaw-Myothit and Thanan-Zedi lines, the Ukhru and Kohima areas were some of the places visited. Here, the fighting was more confused and the location of the Allied troops who were being isolated by the speed of the Japanese advance was more important. On 24 March Indian troops were seen at Sangshak, on the 26th one battalion in Chizami area south-east of Kohima was seen moving west, on the 28th troops were located at MS 12 on the Ukhru-Imphal road, two days later at MS 16, and south of Pukhao on the 30th. On the 30th, the squadron reported having noticed a bamboo road block at Tephema on the Imphal-Kohima road. Some very successful strafing attacks

were made in this area. Myothit was attacked by two aircraft on the 19th, on the 24th six aircraft heavily sprayed Japanese gun positions east of Sangshak, about eight miles south-west of Ukhru, each aircraft making three attacks, and on the 29th ten aircraft participated in a very effective raid on Pukhao about 22 miles west of Sangshak. Captured Japanese documents later revealed that the combined strike on Pukhao had cost the Japanese 14 officers and 217 men killed and wounded. Sometimes when a target appeared which they were incapable of properly dealing with, the aircraft led other aircraft more suitable for the task to the target. On 17 March, 100 loaded mules and some troops were seen on the road to Minthami Chaung. The aircraft resisted the temptation of mounting an immediate attack. They sent a report which brought bombers to the target.

During March the squadron flew 366 sorties totalling about 530 hours. On 8 March, the squadron suffered its first casualty. While on an offensive reconnaissance with five other aircraft, one aircraft caught fire due perhaps to a glycol leak and crashed in flames and the pilot was killed. This was the only loss during the first two months of the squadron's operations. No Japanese aircraft was encountered during this period. In April the Allied troops were fighting at Imphal with their back to the wall. The Japanese came so close that the Imphal airfield came for a brief period within the range of Japanese artillery fire. Air operations were carried out to the maximum extent and No. 1 Squadron flew 412 sorties totalling 485 hours in April. Reconnaissance of the Japanese lines of communication was the main task. Tiddim road, Palel-Tamu-Sittaung road, Imphal-Kohima road and the Ukhru area were constantly visited. In the course of their work the squadron pilots brought information regarding the condition of the roads and bridges in these areas, the movement and position of Indian and Japanese troops, besides carrying out search for evidence of Japanese infiltration. A large number of strafing attacks were made against bashas, mechanical transports, reported gun positions and troops.

There was a Japanese air raid on the airfield at Imphal on 15 April. The squadron suffered some losses in material and two of its aircraft were damaged. There were two casualties in the operations. On 4 April two aircraft were out on a tactical reconnaissance of the Tamu road. They spotted a Japanese tank near Minthami and immediately attacked it. During the attack one pilot noticed a flash from the target. While taking evasive action his aircraft hit a tree and its wingtip was damaged. He thereupon returned but could not make base and was forced to land at Palel. The other pilot however remained to continue the attack but nothing was heard of him since. The reason of his failure to return could not be ascertained but the flash from the target seems to suggest that the tank might have been a trap for decoying unwary aircraft.

In May, particularly towards the end of the month, weather was bad. Monsoon had broken earlier and with greater violence than usual, cutting down the hours of flying and making many sorties abortive. Yet No. 1 Squadron flew a total of 372 sorties of which 32 were by night. This was the first time the squadron took part in night operations. The hours flown during May totalled 493 hours, the increased average duration of the sorties—1·32 hours as against 1·17 hours in April—being due to the fact that several long range tasks were undertaken during the earlier part. Later, long-range reconnaissance was discontinued except on special instructions as several long range Hurricanes including one of No. 1 Squadron were shot down by the Japanese fighters. The extra petrol tank with which the aircraft had to be fitted for undertaking long-range tasks reduced their speed rendering them easy targets for opposing fighters. Flying was therefore limited to within 100 miles radius of Imphal.

In May No. 1 Squadron's aircraft ranged over almost the entire battlefield. In the area north-east of Imphal, the Japanese *15th Division* was being gradually pushed back and No. 1 Squadron flew many sorties to locate Allied troops and notice signs of activity on the part of the Japanese. In the Palel area also similar work was carried out. The Bishenpur area south of Imphal was the scene of great activity. The 17th Indian Division had succeeded in retreating to Imphal in spite of the Japanese attempt to prevent it and was locked in combat with the Japanese *33rd Division* in the vicinity of a village south-west of Imphal. The fighting was particularly fierce around the Japanese positions in the village of Potsangham, south of Bishenpur. Over this area No. 1 Squadron's pilots maintained a continuous patrol. Besides the usual tactical reconnaissance of the battle area, the squadron performed other useful tasks. On 10 May, a pilot, out on reconnaissance of the Bishenpur-Moirang area, gave a running commentary of the tactical battle situation for the benefit of the 32nd Brigade with which he was in contact. Two days later another pilot gave correction to gunners in the Potsangham area. Though the pilots reported occupation of Potsangham on the 19th, reports of continued fighting in the neighbourhood on the succeeding days showed that the Japanese were clinging desperately to their positions. Bombers of the Strategic Air Force dropped about 200 tons of bombs between the 5th and the 10th and one of the tasks of No. 1 Squadron was to assess the damage done by the bombs. Besides, the pilots dropped leaflets in various areas on several occasions. On 21 May two aircraft of the squadron encountered Japanese fighters for the first time. The aircraft fitted with long-range tanks were reconnoitring the Bishenpur area at 1,500 feet when they were attacked by six Japanese Oscars from above. The slow moving Hurricanes had little chance of escape. One was shot down but the

other had a miraculous escape. Its main plane had been hit and the long-range petrol tank had caught fire. The pilot jettisoned the petrol tank and succeeded in escaping, though chased up to Tulihal, by taking evasive action.

June proved to be a trying month for the squadron. The monsoon created many difficulties for the pilot. The runways were often waterlogged, storms made flying hazardous, clouds and rains hampered visibility and returning pilots often found it difficult to locate their strips. Reconnaissance work was however to continue in spite of these handicaps and so there was no rest for No. 1 Squadron. When No. 28 R.A.F. Squadron—the only other fighter reconnaissance squadron—pulled out in the course of June, No. 1 squadron had to assume the sole responsibility for reconnaissance work in this area. The squadron flew 327 sorties of which 232 were tactical, 70 photographic, 1 special task, 14 artillery, 8 contact and 2 weather reconnaissances. This task was carried out in the face of adverse weather which rendered many a sortie abortive and while conversion of the squadron to another type was being effected. Hurricane II B aircraft with which the squadron was equipped were fitted with machine guns only; but by reason of their limited fire power they had become out of date and so conversion to Mark II C aircraft which were fitted with four cannons was effected in June, but this was not allowed to affect the operational work of the squadron.

During the early part of June the squadron's effort was mainly over the Imphal-Kohima road where a battle was raging for clearing the road and establishing communication between Kohima and Imphal. The 5th Indian Division fought its way up the Kohima road from Imphal while the 2nd Division marched down the road from Kohima. Obstacles in their way were many but they were surmounted and the two divisions effected a junction on the morning of 22 June. The usual type of work including observation of Japanese movements, progress of own troops and occasional strafing was carried out by the squadron. The Ukhru area also received much attention, while the Palel and Tiddim fronts were less frequently visited. No. 1 Squadron had also to assess the damage inflicted by the bombers which was necessary for future tactical target planning.

The siege of Imphal was broken and the Japanese *15th and 31st Divisions* began to disintegrate. While still offering resistance they were definitely on the retreat. But in the Palel area and the area south of Imphal, Japanese *33rd Division* hung on grimly to its positions and was the last to admit failure. On 2 July the Japanese discontinued the Imphal operations and devoted their attention to forming a defensive line to check the advance of the Allied forces. During the period following the opening of the Imphal-Kohima road, the squadron aircraft were busy, in addition to the tasks referred to above, in reconnoitring the Japanese lines of communication for signs of use by the

retreating troops. The main effort was in the Ukhrul area where the hilly country made observation difficult. The Tamu-Thanan and Thanan-Lungshong roads also came in for observation. Besides, a larger proportion of sorties was flown in the area south of Imphal.

Nearly throughout the Imphal campaign another squadron of the I.A.F. contributed its mite to break up the Japanese offensive. No. 7 Squadron flying Vengeance light bombers arrived at Uderbund airstrip 12 miles from Kumbhirgram near Agartala, on 22 March 1944. While the domestic camp was at Kumbhigram, operations were to be carried out from Uderbund. This was an inconvenience for the pilots as well as the ground crew, for the journey from the camp to the strip over the bumpy road in an old truck in the dark was none too pleasant. The strip had been cut out of a paddy field and when the rains came it was rendered unserviceable for hours and sometimes for days, trying the patience of the aircrew who chafed at this enforced idleness when they were itching for action. Except for its commander and one other pilot and three navigators with experience of combat operations against the Japanese, the others were pitted against a major enemy for the first time. Operations started on 23 March, with six aircraft going into action. By the end of the month, in the course of four days, the squadron carried out 34 successful sorties involving about 70 hours of flying. Each aircraft carried two 500-lb. bombs and most of the sorties took the pilots about 150 miles from the base. Among other places Kenji and Maungken (north of Homalin) on the Chindwin were bombed with effect. In all 126,500 lbs. of bombs were dropped in those few days.

In April heavy showers of rain rendered the paddy strip unserviceable for four days. Nevertheless, 344 operational sorties totalling 620 hours were flown and 2,74,500 lbs. of bombs were dropped. The area of operations was generally west of a line from Maungkan on the Chindwin in the north to Kalewa in the south, though occasionally attacks were made beyond the line. Places attacked included Maungkan and Kawya north of Homalin, Nawngpuawng, Thaungdut, Myothit, Letpantha, Kalewa, Fortwhite and many other villages. Troop concentrations, mechanical transport, ammunition dumps and dug-outs were the chief targets. Special mention may be made of an attack carried out by twelve aircraft of the squadron, in co-operation with 110 Squadron R.A.F., on a hill top near Imphal. The bombing demanded accuracy as the Allied troops were close to the hill. The pilots acquitted themselves well and the Japanese casualties were estimated in the region of 300. The squadron richly deserved the message of congratulations it received from Brigadier Evans. The same day another successful raid was carried out on the village of Ekban, north-east of Kanglatongbi. Direct hits were scored on dug-outs resulting in numerous casualties. To cut off supplies proceeding from Kalewa,

which was an important Japanese base for the Japanese *33rd Division* vital points on the Tiddim road along which they passed were bombed on the 20th and the following days. The object was to cause landslides which would render the road unusable and hold up supplies vital to the attackers. The squadron suffered certain casualties during the month. On 1 April one pilot who was in a party of 6 aircraft which were returning from an unsuccessful mission due to bad weather conditions, crashed in a valley west of Imphal and was killed. He had however made his navigator bale out before crashing and this officer came back to Uderbund on the 3rd. On the 15th took place an unfortunate accident when a 500-lb. bomb exploded while being fused, killing seven airmen including the squadron's Armament Officer.

The opening days of May were marked by such heavy showers that the strip was under water for four days and the unit was ordered to move to Kumbhirgram where there was an all-weather concrete runway. The move was effected on the 5th. Though the weather continued generally to be bad almost throughout May, the squadron managed to carry on operations from here. Towards the close of May another spell of particularly bad weather kept the squadron grounded. Though there was thus no flying for nine days, the squadron flew 352 operational sorties totalling 611 hours and 2,64,500 lbs. of bombs were dropped.

During May the radius of action of the squadron's aircraft was shortened. The Japanese had closed round Imphal and utmost support was required for the hard-pressed ground troops. Most of the sorties were in the area south of Imphal, though targets north of Imphal occasionally received attention. Potsangbam, east of Imphal-Tiddim road, Moirang, south of Potsangbam, Tou pokpi, south of Shuganu, and the Kalewa area were attacked more than once. Other places included Langgol, north-east of Palel, Tengnoupal, south-east of Palel, Humine, and Kanglatongbi, north of Imphal on the Imphal-Kohima road. Bombing was generally good, the pilots' reports being in some cases confirmed by ground reports. The raid on Langgol on the 6th in support of the ground troops and that on Tou pokpi on the 12th were reported as extremely successful. The bombing of the Kalewa area on the 8th was accurate and quite a number of bashas were left burning. The successful attack on Moirang village on the 17th, coming on top of an earlier attack on the 15th, facilitated its capture by the army a little later. Similarly the village of Tou pokpi was captured following the successful bombings on the 10th, 12th, 13th and 19th.

A good piece of work was the bombing of the southernmost of the three bridges spanning the Manipur river. The bridge was surrounded by high hills and was difficult to approach. The weather was by no means favourable. The attack was however carried out

and it was later confirmed that one direct hit had been scored on the eastern end of the bridge, rendering it unserviceable. However, the good record of the month was clouded by two unfortunate accidents. On the 8th, a pilot was forced to make an emergency landing soon after taking off owing to engine trouble. The aircraft immediately caught fire rendering any rescue work dangerous as the two 500-lb. bombs might burst any moment. S/Ldr. Davis, the Engineering Officer of H.Q. 168 Wing, with commendable pluck, extricated the airgunner from the burning aircraft. Attempt to rescue the pilot was given up as he was found dead. The bombs eventually burst and the aircraft blew up. Another accident occurred on the 30th. A pilot had lost touch with his formation and having sighted some B 25's dived to join them. Unfortunately his aircraft was not recognised. It was fired at with the result that the airgunner was killed, being shot through the head.

The rains in the last week of May were the harbingers of real monsoon and dive bombing Vengeances ceased to be of much use for the time being. The advance party of the squadron left for Ranchi on 6 June and the air party left on the 12th. Before, however, the move was made the squadron carried on operational flying for 200 hours in spite of the fact that no flying was possible for five days due to bad weather. Some of the sorties were abortive for the same reason. Two determined attempts to bomb one of the Manipur bridges on the 1st and another on the 11th (at M.S. 126½) ended in failure.

The tenacity of the pilots however was attended with success on occasions. On the 5th were carried out two attacks on the Japanese administrative headquarters at Kangpokpi village on the Imphal-Kohima road. Huge explosions and large flashes were observed and direct hits were scored on red-roofed buildings and bashas. On the 6th direct hits were scored on Lokchao bridge on the Palel-Tamu road and the bridge was completely shattered.

Yet another squadron of the I.A.F., No. 9, operated in Imphal area for sometime. It started its operations from Kulaura near Sylhet on 29 April 1944. Its task was to provide cover to the transport aircraft which were then engaged in the vital task of carrying supplies and reinforcements to Imphal. In pursuance of this the squadron maintained a constant air patrol from Silchar to Palel and over the Imphal valley. On 27 April alone the pilots were in the air for 55 hours. On 12 May a detachment of 14 aircraft from the squadron went to Kumbhirgram to carry on operations from there. The work involved risk as the Hurricane aircraft with which the squadron was equipped were hardly in a position to fight on equal terms with the Japanese aircraft which had increased their activity in the Imphal area.

Not directly connected with the battle for Imphal, but assuming importance as a result of this Japanese offensive, was the Chin Hills

and Lushai Hills area west of the main Japanese line of advance from the south. The 17th Indian Division had withdrawn to Imphal and the Japanese who controlled Tiddim, Falam and Haka were in a position to mount an attack westward from these areas or further south. The area was hilly jungle going up to 6,000 feet and there was no road capable of taking mechanical transport east of Aijal. A big thrust through this area was therefore unlikely but small penetrations were possible. To meet this potential threat, Lushai Brigade opened its Headquarters at Aijal on 4 April 1944. The Brigade area was vast for the force employed, roughly extending from Tipaimukh-Tolbol Line in the north to Lungngo area in the south and so, for achieving its primary task of preventing the Japanese advance westwards into India within the Brigade boundaries, regular troops were stationed at key points, while small detachments from them and irregular levies were disposed at various points *viz.*, Taipang, Tibual, Leilet south-west of Tibual, Klangpi east-north-east of Thingsai, Sopum area north-west of Klang Klang, Thanzung south-east of Thingsai etc., to provide an information screen to enable regular troops to take appropriate action in case of threat.

On account of the difficult nature of the country, movement of supplies to this area by road was difficult. Within the area itself, on account of lack of labourers and mules, forces were likely to remain almost immobile. Air drop was accordingly arranged not only for the forces at stations but also for the roving units. The supply-dropping Dakotas needed escorts and No. 9 Squadron IAF which had been providing cover to the transport aircraft in the Imphal area was detailed for the task. On 29 May the squadron moved to Comilla which became its new base till 10 July when it again moved to Singerbil for the duration of the monsoon. From Comilla and later from Singerbil the squadron operated mainly in support of the Dakotas dropping supplies in the Lushai Brigade area.

In June the squadron flew 133 operational sorties totalling 287 flying hours. With the exception of eight sorties all the rest were as escorts to the Dakotas. The area of operations extended from Champai area in the north to Siatlai area in the south, the majority of the sorties being in Thingsai, Klang-Klang and Sakta areas. On 2 June the squadron went on escort duty as far south as Mowdok, west of Daletme, and on 30 June as far north as the area north of Hnahlan. Besides the escort duty, six night strafings were carried out against watercraft on the Mayu and Kaladan rivers in XV Corps area. On such occasions Chittagong was used as an advanced base.

In July the number of sorties appreciably increased. Altogether 210 sorties were flown involving 443.10 flying hours. This effort was put up under monsoon conditions and in spite of the inevitable

disorganization consequent on the squadron's move to Singerbil. As in June, escorting was the chief task, 199 sorties being flown for this purpose. The area of operations was the same but Klang Klang and Sakta areas almost monopolised the supply drops. A few night rhubarbs in XV Corps area were undertaken but most of these were unsuccessful due to the bad weather.

Supply-dropping was, as has already been noticed, the key to victory in the Imphal battle and escorting of the aircraft engaged in that work was equally important. But by the end of July 1944 the Japanese offensive was broken. The Allied aircraft held the mastery of the skies and the danger of interception of supply-dropping Dakotas by the Japanese fighters was virtually over. It was considered therefore that provision of escort for the Dakotas was in most cases unnecessary. The squadron also for sometime had been chafing at its monotonous, though valuable, task and was asking to be put on strafing work. Nevertheless, for another month the squadron had to carry on escort duties, though it was permitted to undertake quite a number of strafing sorties. Out of a total of 228 sorties, totalling 446 hours, 159 were on escort duty, 56 on day strafes and 13 on night rhubarbs.

The Japanese were withdrawing from the Imphal area and the Allies had assumed offensive all along the front. As part of the general plan the Lushai Brigade also began exerting pressure in the Haka—Falam area and putting road blocks on the Tiddim road to hinder the retreat of the Japanese forces and inflict on them as many casualties as possible. The Dakotas were engaged in dropping supplies in the Champai and Hnahlan areas for the troops engaged in blocking the Tiddim road, and in the Klang Klang area for the troops pressing against Haka.

The strafings were carried out in XV Corps area which was to engage the squadron's whole attention from September onwards. Shipping on the Mayu and Kaladan rivers, communications in the Akyab area and several villages were attacked. On 11 August eight aircraft co-operated with No. 483 American, No. 67 RAF and No. 4 IAF Squadrons in a successful strike against Hparabyin west of Kwazon. Daletme was strafed on the 17th, Mowdok on the 18th, Laung Chaung village north-east of Donbaik on the 26th and Tanko north-east of Akyab and again Laung Chaung on the 27th. In addition to these, operations were also carried out from the 27th to 29th from Palel when Minthami, north-west of Mawlaik, was attacked. During this period of operations the squadron suffered some losses in men and aircraft.

CHAPTER XIII

THE BATTLE FOR CENTRAL BURMA

The siege of Imphal had been broken. The Japanese, having suffered heavy losses in men and equipment, were in retreat and the Allies were now in a position gradually to turn more and more to the offensive. There were only two roads leading to the Chindwin. These were (*i*) Imphal-Palel-Tamu-Sittaung and (*ii*) Imphal-Tiddim-Kalemyo-Kalewa. There was also a road connecting Tamu with Kalemyo, thus providing an alternative route from Imphal to Kalewa, *via.*, Indainggyi. The Allied offensive moved in two main thrusts: IV Corps down the Tiddim road and XXXIII Corps towards Tamu. The capture of Ukhru which was the focal point of all communications in that area was also given top priority.

The south-west monsoon had reached its full fury over the operational area but it was not, according to the declared policy of the Supreme Commander, to interrupt operations and the Japanese were not to be given any time to regroup their forces. In the course of July 1944 the Japanese were driven from the perimeter of the Imphal plain. Ukhru was captured by the 7th Indian Division by 10 July and the entire Ukhru area was cleared during August. Pursuit on the axis of Palel and Tamu was taken up by the 23rd Indian Division and one brigade of the 2nd Division and Tamu fell on 4 August. Sittaung fell on 4 September to a brigade of the 11th East African Division which had taken over from the 23rd Indian Division at Tamu. The main body of the Division captured Yazagyo on the road between Tamu and Kalemyo on 4 October. In the south, the Japanese attempts to delay the Allied advance were overcome by the 5th and 17th Indian Divisions in a series of small actions during August and September, and the Japanese suffered heavy casualties during their retreat along the Tiddim road. Tiddim fell on 18 October and the capture of Fort White followed on 8 November. Kalemyo fell on 13 November as a result of a two-pronged drive—from the north by the 11th East African Division and from the west by the 5th Indian Division. Soon after this Kalewa was captured (2 December) and the East Africans crossed the Chindwin and firmly established themselves on the east bank. The Lushai Brigade, which had distinguished itself earlier by blocking the Tiddim road behind the retreating Japanese 33rd Division and inflicting casualties on them, drove the Japanese towards Gangaw and over the Chindwin. Meanwhile IV Corps had returned from India at the end of October and reopened its headquarters near Imphal. During November the 19th Indian Division under the command

-of IV Corps crossed the Chindwin at Sittaung. By 3 December the Allies held three bridgeheads across the river, at Sittaung east of Tamu, at Mawlaik 50 miles to the south, and at Kalewa.

The ground operations were magnificently supported by the air forces. "Direct support, moves of formations by air, constant and unfailing provision of the army's needs, evacuation of the sick and the wounded—all this played a large part in the Army's success."¹ "In no campaign in history have the plans of the Army been so interdependent with operations in the air. The Fourteenth army could have achieved nothing without the support and maintenance provided by the Allied Air Forces."² Besides, the indirect support provided by the air forces—in attacking Japanese communications, dumps and concentrations behind the lines and preventing deployment of their full strength in every important engagement was a major factor in the success of the offensive and expulsion of the Japanese from Burma. The success of the air operations was due chiefly to "(i) the virtual elimination of Japanese air opposition resulting in complete predominance and liberty of action of our offensive and air transport forces ; (ii) the steady growth of air supply resources and improvements in their organisation ; (iii) the occupation of Akyab and Ramree, providing advanced air supply bases and enabling us to reorient and shorten the supply lines in relation to the advance southward of Fourteenth Army."³

The Allied offensive following the Japanese failure to capture Imphal opened with reduced air strength. The monsoon conditions and the scarcity of all-weather airfields in the forward areas necessitated the withdrawal of seventeen squadrons from the line for conversion, rest or training. It was however a well-balanced force of experienced squadrons and was able to meet the demands of the army.

The Japanese Air Force had some 450 aircraft in operational units in this theatre and of these about 150 aircraft were disposed in Burma and Thailand for immediate use. Between July and December 1944, there were not more than about seventy fighters and thirty bombers in Burma proper. When General MacArthur invaded the Philippines, about one hundred Japanese aircraft were withdrawn to that theatre. This together with the constant attrition caused by the Allied fighters resulted in a steady decline in the Japanese air strength. This meagre force was not in a position to contest the air supremacy established by the Allies. The Japanese aircraft accordingly confined themselves to sneak raids, usually undertaken under the cover of clouds. The Allied transport aircraft were the most vulnerable during the whole of the advance since they were

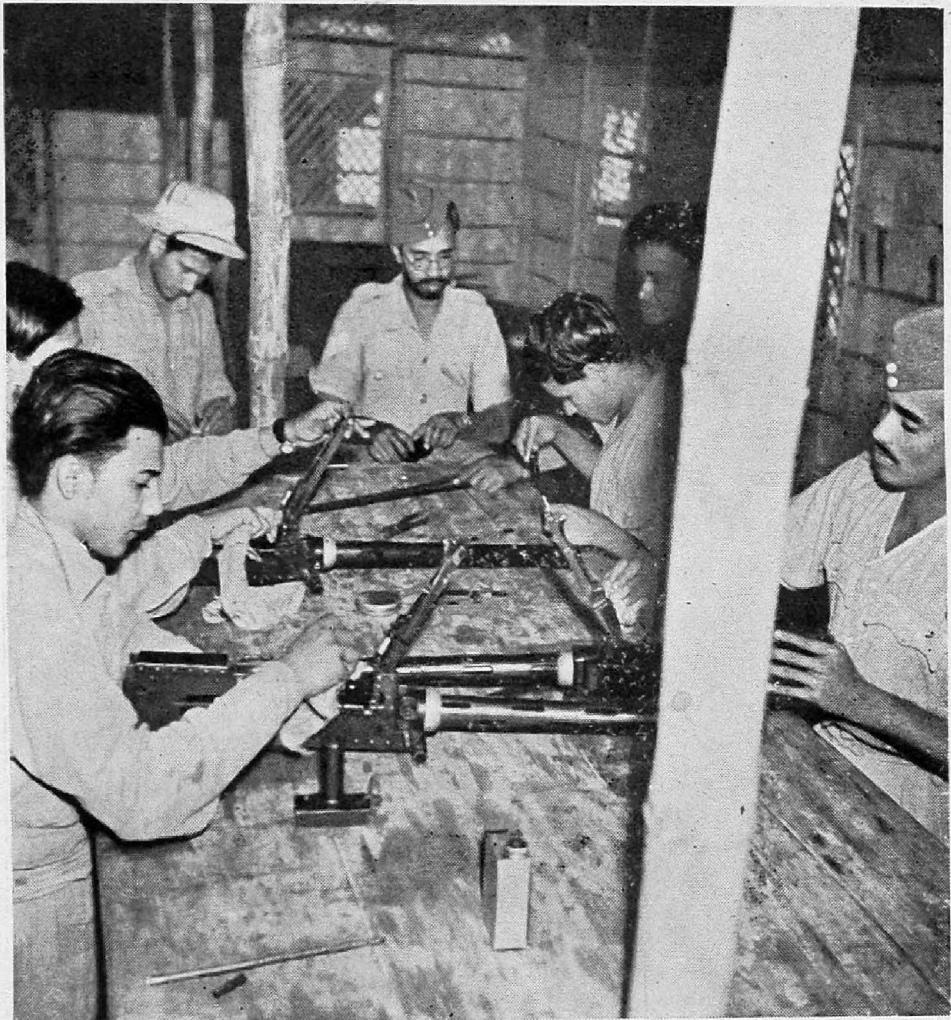
1. Lieut.-General Messervy.

2. *Campaign of the Fourteenth Army*—General Slim.

3. Air Chief Marshal Sir Keith Park's Despatch for the period from 1 June 1944 to 2 May 45.



Monsoon rains on an airfield in Assam turn it into awful quagmire



Armament section of a fighter Hurricane Squadron reconditioning the equipment

continually operating in front of the warning screen and fighter bases were not available as far forward as was tactically desirable. That the danger was not imaginary was proved when one day in November, while on a supply mission along the Tiddim road, five transport aircraft were shot down. Again on 12 January, four more were destroyed while dropping supplies near Onbauk. Interception of these sneak raids was a major problem and since it was not always possible to engage the raiders in the air, the searching out and destruction of the Japanese aircraft on the ground was considered necessary, and this provided another headache as the destruction of aircraft possessing a wide choice of airfields containing many revetments and defended by an efficient light anti-aircraft and machine gun system was not an easy task. The Allied air force however succeeded in destroying a large percentage of the Japanese aircraft on the ground and in the air and made their incursions so costly and ineffectual that they degenerated into a series of sporadic and infrequent attempts to disrupt the Allied forward columns. Even air reconnaissance was given up after the futile and costly endeavour of late September when the Japanese lost four Dinahs. This handicap was largely responsible for the Japanese ignorance of the movement of IV Corps from the north to the south prior to the Irrawaddy offensive. As a result, the Allied troops enjoyed a large measure of immunity from air attack, the air and ground supply went on smoothly and the close support squadrons worked with accuracy and effect and the strategic bombers were able to cause disruption to the Japanese communications far to the rear.

Air supply was a decisive factor in the land campaign. The defence of Imphal would not have been possible without it and now it was a vital factor in the army's offensive. In fact air supply largely determined the speed of the army's advance. It has been aptly said that the army marched on the wings of the air force. From July until November, XXXIII Corps in its drive eastwards to the Chindwin, southwards along the Kabaw valley and down the Tiddim road, was provided with munitions and food entirely by the transport squadrons under conditions of unbelievable difficulty. In June 1944 there were eleven transport squadrons engaged in air supply, four British and seven American. The end of the monsoon and commencement of a large-scale offensive called for increased effort and by May 1945, the number rose to nine and sixteen respectively. Besides supplies, the transport aircraft also carried troops, evacuated the wounded and the sick from the battle areas. The magnitude of the air-lift can be realised from the fact that in February 1945 alone, 51,210 short tons of supplies were hauled into the operational area.

During the monsoon months the Strategic Air Force underwent some reduction in strength, retaining only three Liberator and two Wellington squadrons. In consequence of the reduction in strength

and with the monsoon at its height, tactical targets best calculated to assist the Fourteenth Army *viz.*, communications, shipping and railways were subjected to attacks. With six more Liberator squadrons arriving in October and one more in January, the Strategic Air Force was brought to its full strength for the vital six months to follow. Its operational function also was accordingly expanded to include all the duties of strategic bombing.

The operations were directed against (1) shipping and harbour installations, (2) overland supply routes into Southern Burma, and (3) internal communications, supply dumps, airfields and military installations. For the prevention of the movement of supplies by sea, harbours, docks and port facilities were often subjected to attacks. Mining was added as being a profitable method of delaying the passage of supplies. The Bangkok-Moulmein railway was of paramount importance to the Japanese for supplying and maintaining their forces in Burma. This railway accordingly received close attention and traffic on this line was reduced to a trickle. Within Burma the bomber targets were generally supply centres or nodal communication points or built-up areas. Attack on Mandalay and Sagaing is a notable example of this type. Such attacks increased in February 1945 during which month nearly two-thirds of the total number of sorties of the Strategic Air Force were directed against targets in or near the battle front. The railhead at Madaya, the Yenangyaung area, Myittha, Mahlaing and Myingyan, Toungoo (21 April) were all bombed to facilitate the progress of the army. Supply dumps in Rangoon were bombed with success during March and April 1945.

Besides, four squadrons of Mitchells (B. 25) were withdrawn from the Strategic Air Force for close support work with the army. They operated in conjunction with the fighter-bombers and added greatly to the weight and effectiveness of the close support attacks. An outstanding operation of this kind was the attack against the stronghold of Gangaw in the Kabaw valley on 10 January. The successful air attack led to its occupation within 90 minutes and was responsible for the withdrawal of the Japanese from the neighbourhood during the next few days.

Tactical Support

Tactical support of XXXIII Corps and IV Corps was entrusted to 221 Group and of XV Corps to 224 Group. The squadrons of 221 Group operated, from bases covering a front of some 200 miles and a depth which, in November, was no less. Most of them were on a highly mobile basis and moved forward with the advancing front as quickly as landing grounds were prepared to receive them.

Army-air co-operation was ensured by the establishment, in the closing months of 1944, of Air Support Signal Units with Visual

Control Posts. The special value of these posts lay in the extra flexibility and accuracy which they lent to an air operation. The former device of indicating targets by smoke shells was always liable to inaccuracies in both place and time as well as to counterfeiting and so was resorted to only when the target lay in flat jungle country, not determinable from the air. The Visual Control Posts system was a success and contributed materially to that close and efficient co-operation of the ground and air forces which characterised the campaign of 1944-45. The introduction of V.C.P. method led in its turn to the employment of the "cab rank" method. The aircraft patrolled continuously over selected areas, maintaining touch with the V.C.P., and awaited signals for attacking fresh targets. But though air support was thus available to engage any target at a moment's notice, this method was wasteful of flying hours and reduced petrol stocks and diminished the weight of air attack, since in order to maintain a continuous patrol the aircraft could seldom operate in more than pairs.

The backbone of direct air support was provided by Hurricanes, with or without bombs, though Thunderbolts, Lightnings and Spitfires were also used for this purpose. Some Hurribomber squadrons enjoyed an immense reputation for their accurate pin-pointing of targets within a few yards of the Allied positions. Besides fighter-bombers, ground-attack fighters also frequently operated in close support, being particularly useful in locating gun sites and attacking them. Typical of the close support given by the air force were the operations at Monywa and Gangaw. The speed with which the Japanese defences at Monywa were reduced was chiefly due to continuous attacks by Thunderbolts, Mosquitos and Hurricanes with bombs, cannon and rockets. The particularly strong Japanese positions at Gangaw were secured only after an "earthquake attack" by bombers on 10 January. The intensity of the Japanese artillery barrage against the 19th Indian Division bridgeheads across the Irrawaddy was greatly reduced as a result of successful operations against artillery positions by Thunderbolts and Mitchells. One operation in tactical support of the Fourteenth Army is worthy of special mention. On 19 February a Hurricane D squadron, firing rocket projectiles, put out of action twelve tanks which the Japanese were about to throw into the battle for the bridgehead opposite Myinmu.

The part played by the Strategic Air Force in making attacks on the targets some distance behind the battle area at the request of the ground forces has been briefly noted. The army was also immensely helped in this regard by ground-attack fighters. Their targets were animal and motor transports on roads and miscellaneous river-craft. The aircraft attacked with rocket projectiles and bombs as well as 40-mm. cannon and guns of smaller calibre. The air force had given tactical support of this nature throughout the Imphal

campaign. As time went on more and more weight was released on these targets.

In July 1944, when the Japanese were trying to withdraw from the perimeter of the Imphal plain, their transport on the Tiddim road and the other routes eastward to the Chindwin suffered severe losses from air attacks. Besides direct attacks upon vehicles, landslides were caused on the Tiddim road, and bridges along it and in the Kabaw valley were destroyed to hamper the Japanese retreat. Japanese diaries captured subsequently gave ample evidence of the success of these measures.

In August, the Chindwin river which had long been in use as a line of communication for the Japanese with the riverine ports, particularly Monywa and Kalewa, as the active points of supply, became most important as a supply route as the overland routes became more or less unusable owing to the monsoon. Riverside targets therefore received increased attention, fighter-bombers and bombers being diverted to intensify the attacks. Mitchells also laid mines to catch traffic attempting to move under cover either of cloud or of darkness.

With the advent of better weather, road transports were more in evidence and attacks upon them increased, particularly during the advance to the Irrawaddy in December, the thrust towards Meiktila during late February and early March and above all during the final advance towards Rangoon in the second half of April. Though Japanese lorries moved mainly under cover of darkness, they could not always elude the vigilance of the Allied aircraft. As a result during the period 1 June 1944—2 May 1945 at least 3,846 mechanical transport vehicles were successfully attacked.¹

Attack on trains and other railway targets presented certain difficulties. Trains usually moved by night and all important railway targets were guarded by efficient anti-aircraft defences. Nevertheless, a large number of locomotives were successfully attacked by day as well as by night with the result that shortage of locomotives hampered the movement of trains.

Waterways in Burma served as Japanese lines of communication and so attacks on watercraft were delivered whenever possible. The effort of the Allied aircraft in denying the use of the Chindwin to the retreating Japanese has been alluded to. Subsequently watercraft on the Irrawaddy, always an important Japanese line of communication, and on the waterways on the Arakan coast and in South-West Burma were successfully attacked.

On the Fourteenth Army front the Indian Air Force was represented by No. 1 Squadron up to 25 March 1945, and upon its withdrawal from operations, by No. 7 Squadron from 26 March to

4. Air Chief Marshal Sir Keith Park's Despatch for the period 1 June 1944 to 2 May 1945.

23 May. No. 1 Squadron had commenced operations on 5 February 1944 and carried on its work during the fateful battle of Imphal. The relief of Imphal brought no respite for No. 1 Squadron as No. 28 Squadron R.A.F., the other reconnaissance squadron in this theatre, had been withdrawn in June and No. 1 Squadron's continuance there was indispensable. The Japanese were retreating and the squadron's effort was directed to covering the main lines of their withdrawal. This meant reconnaissance of the following routes: Ukhru and the tracks radiating from it; the road from Palel to Sittaung on the Chindwin via., Tamu, the road running north from Tamu through Mintha, Myothit, Shwelebo, Thanan, Humine, Chassud, Kamjong, on to Ukhru; the road Htinzin (south-west of Minthami) to Yazagyo (north of Kalemyo); the Chindwin river between Tonhe (north of Thaungdut) and Mawlaik, Moirang—Churachandpur area of the Tiddim road; besides other minor routes. Altogether 307 sorties were flown in July totalling more than 340 hours. Most of these sorties were tactical reconnaissances, the others being photographic and contact reconnaissances with a few message and supply dropping missions. Though the withdrawal of the Japanese troops, tired and worn out as they were, was not as well camouflaged as their advance had been, effective reconnaissance demanded careful observation and accurate interpretation of the things observed. It was not enough to know whether a track was capable of taking mechanical transport or fit for being used by mules only. It was required to be observed whether it showed signs of being used and if so by what kind of transport. A bridge might be found unserviceable but well-worn tracks from both ends of it might prove the passage of traffic along the route. Several tracks converging on a point might be an indication of a mechanical transport park. Hoof marks, imprints of elephants' pads, ruts made by cart wheels and tyre marks had of course their own tales to tell. If wheel marks abruptly ended in a jungle it was almost certain that vehicles were parked near the spot. Even an apparently insignificant detail that jungle creepers were seen across a road was not devoid of importance as it showed that the road was not much frequented. Besides searching for all these signs, the pilots carried out attacks whenever any target was noticed. During July, targets were plentiful and many attacks were made on motor vehicles, river craft, covered trenches, bunkers, bashas, gun positions and troops with good results. When it appeared that any target could not be adequately dealt with by it, the reconnoitring aircraft held its fire and directed other aircraft to the target. Thus on 14 July the Commanding Officer led six Spitfires to the Chassud area where he had noticed a number of Japanese soldiers. Locating Allied troops was as much a part of the squadron's work as the observation of the Japanese movements or defensive positions. On 29 July the squadron lost two pilots who

failed to return from a reconnaissance of the Tamu-Sittaung area. They were last seen entering cloud in the Palel area by the third pilot out on a reconnaissance of the same area. Both crashed and were killed.

In August, the necessity for reconnaissance of the Ukhru area diminished and so the other areas received more attention, work proceeded on more or less the same lines as in July. Targets for attack were less evident as the Japanese began splitting into small groups and using unfrequented tracks and chaungs. The pilots reported location of Allied forward troops and the progress made by them. On 1 August the Allied troops were noticed at Churachandpur, on the 3rd at MS 42, on the 4th at MS 47 and on the 5th at MS 54. On the 20th they had moved up to MS 73 and by the 25th MS 86 was reached. Weather in August was very unfavourable and no flying was possible for eight days. Still the squadron flew 354 sorties totalling 466 hours 45 minutes.

In September the weather deteriorated further, considerably restricting operations. Though operations continued throughout the month with the exception of two days only as compared to eight days in August, the number of sorties per day was much less. There were only 292 sorties in September, totalling a little more than 400 hours. The duration of the sorties was however longer and this is explained by the fact that with the steady withdrawal of the Japanese, the area of operations was more and more removed from No. 1 Squadron's base at Imphal and so the pilots had to remain longer in the air. As the Hurricane's range was limited, extra petrol tanks had to be used.

During the month the Allied troops made steady advance down the Imphal-Tiddim, Tamu-Kalemyo, and Tamu-Sittaung roads and at the end of the month the Japanese were concentrated along the line Tiddim—Fort White-Kalewa-Mawlaik-Mawku. While, as before, the Sittaung, Kalemyo and Tiddim roads were closely searched, reconnaissances were also carried beyond the Chindwin and covered Tanga (north of Mawlaik)—Maingnyaung-Lawtha, Mogaung—Nanbon, Paungbyin—Kaungkasi—Wayongon—Pinlebu, Thaungdut—Wetkauk—Ashegon, and Pinlebu—Wuntho—Indaw (Ry)—Banmauk, areas. The rivers Mu, Uyu and Myittha were scanned for signs of traffic. The railway line between Kawlin and Indaw was reconnoitred and though all the bridges were found destroyed, all the stations appeared occupied. On the 17th the squadron was asked to find out the state of defence of Pt. 1060, a hill feature east of Neyinzaya Chaung in Yazagyo area and determine whether advance was possible without being observed. Bunkers were observed on the east, west and south sides of the hill and on the summit. Allied troops were located at MS 100 on the Tiddim road on the 3rd, at MS 112 on the 6th and MS 120 on the 13th.

Photographs were taken of various areas and these and maps were dropped for the benefit of the forward troops. One of the important targets photographed was Taukkyan airfield, south-west of Kalemyo, on the 13th. The airfield was 2,000 yards long and, though several craters were observed, it appeared otherwise to be in a good condition. The usual strafing of bashas, mechanical transport, boats and rafts etc., was done.

At the beginning of October, Bumzang, eight miles north-east of Tiddim, was in Allied hands. Tiddim itself fell on 18 October. Further south, operations were undertaken in the Falam-Haka area and both these places were captured on the 19th. A steady concentration of forces was being effected for the attack on Yazagyo. Further east, the Allied advance had brought them near Mawku on the Chindwin. The Japanese forces were more or less disposed as in the previous month. During the month the squadron flew a record of 439 operational sorties including three night reconnaissances, totalling about 780 hours (779 hours 40 minutes). During the first half of the month operations were handicapped by weather and the majority of the sorties was flown during the second half. Kalemyo and Kalewa areas were the chief theatres of the squadron's operations. Kalewa-Mawlaik, Kalewa-Shwegen-Pyinaing, Kalewa-Mingin-Maukkadaw lines, and the roads leading north-west and south from Kalemyo were constantly reconnoitred. Indainggyi area was marked for special observation. Reconnaissance was carried as far south as Gangaw. Besides, Falam-Haka and Kennedy Peak-Fort White areas, Paungbyin-Auktaung-Ontha-Wayongon road, the track from Ontha to Nanbon, Pinlebu-Thayetkon-Banmauk road—Kodan Chaung from Lawtha to its junction with the Chindwin south of Mawlaik, and Homalin-Nawngpuawng-Mansi area were also visited. The squadron went as far as the Mandalay-Myitkyina railway between Kanbalu and Kawlin for discovering signs of rolling stocks and locomotives. The usability of roads, tracks and rivers, the extent of their use and the kind of traffic on them were as usual the primary objects of observation. The squadron brought valuable information regarding track activity in the Indainggyi-Indainggale area, the existence of a possible Japanese headquarters area near Siyin on the Kalemyo-Fort White road, marks of many tracks all round Pyinaing and of activity on them, use of Shwegen-Thetkegyin—Pyinaing road by mechanical transport and the topography of Pantha—Pyinaing—Maukkadaw—Shwegen area. Much canoe building was seen in Auktaung—Paungbyin area on the 25th.

The value of the squadron's reconnaissance work during the month was acknowledged by the ground forces and a congratulatory message was received from the Intelligence Officer, XXXIII Corps. Besides this general appreciation, three other messages were received from XXXIII Corps congratulating the squadron on the work

carried out on 6, 7, 13 and 16 October. This month saw an intensification of photographic work, a total of 9,555 prints being turned out. The squadron was commended "for skill and speed with which air photographs have been produced and dropped on forward troops".⁵

The Japanese did not attempt a major stand anywhere in November. The squadron was more busy than ever in discovering their lines of retreat, locating their positions from day to day and strafing all manner of targets. An average strength of 17 pilots flew 524 operational sorties totalling 1,000 hours and 30 minutes—admittedly a remarkable effort. Night reconnaissances totalled 25 hours 10 minutes. Most of the sorties were in the Kalemyo-Kalewa area and further to the south and east. Kalemyo-Kan-Gangaw-Monywa line along the river Myittha, Kalewa-Chaungwa-Mingin—Maukkadaw line along the Chindwin, Kalewa—Shwegen—Thetkegyin—PyinGaing—Ye-u road running to the east of Kalewa were searched. Occasionally, the track leading northward from PyinGaing to Kyaunggyingon and Mawtongyi and then north-west to Indaw, Lawtha and Pantha, the road from Paungbyin to Ontha and the track from Ontha southward to Nanbon, and the Chindwin river from Paungbyin southwards were also visited. As the month wore on visits were extended further east up to the railway line and included the road (Thayekon—Pinlebu—Kawlin—Wuntho, the track Thaikta (north of Aungbin)—Naunggauk—Kyuhla on the Mu river—then east to Thityabin on the railway line and the railway line between Kawlin and Kanbalu. The aircraft generally went in twos but occasionally they went singly and on such occasions they were sometimes provided with Spitfire escort, when there was likelihood of encountering hostile aircraft.

Before the fall of Kalemyo on 15 November, reconnaissance of this area was frequently undertaken. The squadron was briefed to observe, among other things, whether the bridge at Hpaungzeik over the Neyinzaya Chaung, north-east of Kalemyo, was serviceable or not. The day reconnaissances showed the bridge to be unserviceable but piles of wood on the bank of the Chaung suggested that the bridge was made serviceable at night, the planks being removed by day to cover up the night's activities. This was confirmed when S/Ldr. Arjan Singh on the night of 3 November found the bridge fit for all traffic. The squadron located the Allied troops and often dropped photographs and maps for their use. On the 11th Allied troops were found at Mawlaik, on the 13th at Kya-In, on the 20th Allied mechanical transport and mules were seen moving across the Hpaungzeik bridge, on the 24th the Allies were noticed at Yawzu on the Chindwin south of Kalewa and on the 30th at Paungbyin.

The squadron received a notable appreciation of its efforts when Major General Gracey on behalf of the 20th Indian Division

5. Brigadier Walins, General Staff XXXIII Corps.

presented it with a Japanese officer's sword captured in the battle of Imphal in recognition of "assistance readily and courageously given by its pilots and ground crews."

The squadron suffered two accidents during the month. On the 22nd one aircraft while returning to base from a reconnaissance over Wetkauk—Naungmana road crashlanded due to a glycol leak. The aircraft burst into flames but the pilot extricated himself from the burning aircraft and after three days' trekking through the jungle succeeded in reaching the lines. The pilot of the other aircraft was not however so lucky. While diving to strafe camouflaged bashas in the Shwemyin area, he failed to pull out and crashed. His death took away the only A.F.C. in the Indian Air Force at this time.

In December, the operations were carried out on the usual scale up to the 20th after which the tactical reconnaissance commitments for the Fourteenth Army were taken over by No. 28 Squadron R.A.F. From the 21st onwards, operations were undertaken only when No. 28 Squadron was unable to cope with the demand and specific requests were received from the Fourteenth Army. The squadron flew 335 sorties totalling 775½ hours.

The trans-Chindwin offensive opened at the beginning of December. IV Corps consisting of the 7th and 19th Indian Divisions and 254 Tank Brigade and XXXIII Corps consisting of the 2nd British and 20th Indian Divisions, 268 Brigade and 255 Tank Brigade (both Indian) were available. In the north, the 19th Indian Division after crossing the Chindwin at and above Paungbyin advanced eastwards along the two main tracks—one through Wetkauk and the other through Wayongon. The country was difficult and the Japanese covering forces offered desperate resistance. But the progress was rapid. Pinlebu was captured on 16 December, Wuntho on the 19th and Kawlin on the 20th. A brigade of the division also established contact with the 36th British Division at Rail Indaw on the 20th. The 2nd Division crossed at Kalewa and began its advance towards Ye-U along the Shwemyin-Thetkegyin-Pyinaing-Ye-U road. Pyinaing was taken on 24 December, Kaduma on the 30th and Ye-U on the New Year's Day.⁶ Two divisions were now converging on Shwebo, the 19th Indian Division from the north and the 2nd Division from the west. The 19th Indian Division overcame strong resistance at Kanbalu on 2 January and reached Shwebo on the 7th. The 2nd Division made its entry a day later. The 19th Indian Division also succeeded in crossing the Irrawaddy and securing a foothold at Thabeikkyin on 9th January.⁷ By the end of January, the 2nd Division also reached the Irrawaddy at Myinmu and Sagaing. Meanwhile the 20th Indian Division which had crossed the Chindwin at Mawlaik on 3 December marched south and occupied Maukkadaw on the

6. 3 January according to Mountbatten's Report p. 146.

7. 14 January according to Mountbatten's Report p. 147.

Chindwin on Christmas Day and Budalin, a Japanese communication centre, on 10 January. The town of Monywa, the chief Japanese post and administrative centre on the Chindwin was captured by 22 January after heavy and costly fighting. On the same day other troops of the division reached the Irrawaddy at Myinmu, 40 miles west of Mandalay, and took the village after heavy fighting.

In the southern-most sector of the front it was believed that the Japanese were making for Monywa down the Chindwin and eastward from Gangaw. Air reconnaissance of the routes Gangaw-Kanthet-Saga-Zeittaung-Chinbyit-Yinnabin-Monywa and Mingin-Kani-Monywa, confirmed this belief. Much track activity was noticed in the Mingin, Maukkadaw, Winmana and Kani areas besides large numbers of rivercraft on the Chindwin. The road and tracks between Gangaw and Monywa also showed ample evidence of use.

Reconnaissance along the Indaw (Oil) Mawtongyi-Chingyaung-Pyingains and Mawlaik-Kadu-Tawtha-Kyaunggyigon-Chingyaung routes was most intensive. For the whereabouts of the troops advancing along these two lines, the army relied solely on observation from the air. A large number of sorties was flown, particularly in the first week, to cover both the tracks. Due to the nature of the terrain large portions of the tracks were not visible from the air and so location of troops was extremely difficult. To make location possible, the troops resorted to displaying ground signs. Whenever contact was established, the position of the troops together with the ground signs displayed was marked on a map which was then dropped on the headquarters at Mawlaik. Besides, the usual information about the type and volume of Japanese traffic along the various lines of communication was supplied to the army.

In the 2nd Division area, reconnaissance was carried out up to 14 December between Thetkegyin and Pyingaing and also along the tracks Kado-Maukkadaw and Pyingaing-Maukkadaw. Afterwards it shifted eastwards to the main road Pyingaing-Ye-U. Sorties carried out between the 18th and the 20th showed that the Japanese were withdrawing quickly, after obstructing the road with tree trunks at frequent intervals.

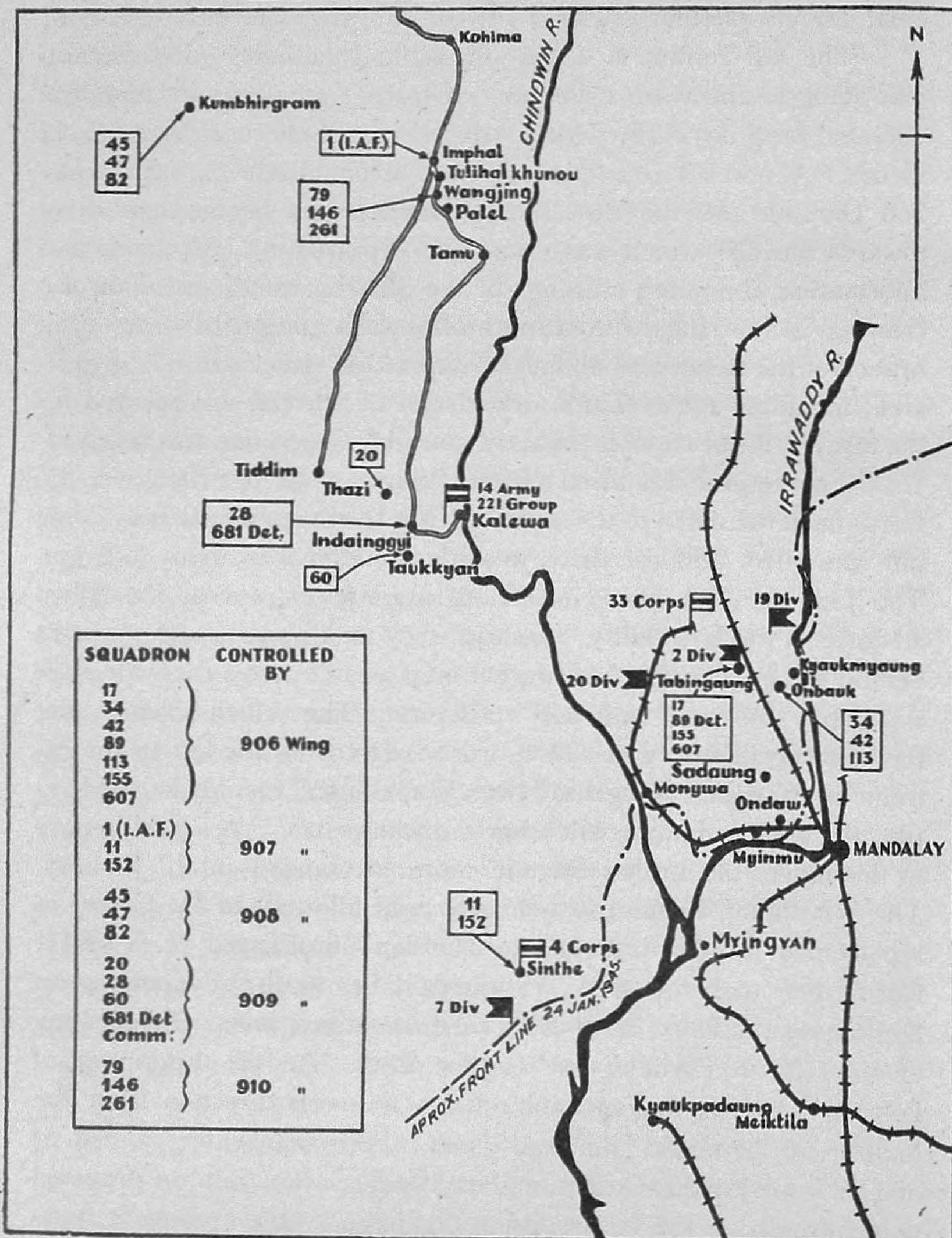
In the 19th Indian Division area in the north, reconnaissance centred round Wuntho on the railway, and Pinlebu and Kyunhla—both on the Mu river. The road and railway line from Wuntho to Kanbalu, the tracks Thityabin on the railway—Kyunhla Thetkegyin-Naunggauk-Theiktaung, Chaungzauk-Pinlebu-Gyobin on the Mu river to Kyunhla, the road from Pinlebu to Pinbon and from there to Banmauk and Wuntho, the tracks from Wuntho north-eastward to Shwedaung, and from Pinlebu to Sinlamaung in the north besides some other minor tracks were covered. The sorties were intended mainly for taking photographs of Japanese camps, dumps etc. A

number of tactical reconnaissances were also flown for determining the direction and volume of Japanese traffic. Allied troops were also located at various places ; at Kyundaw on the 10th, at Banmauk on the 13th, at Manket on the 17th and at Wuntho, Yeshin and Kongyi (both latter west of the Mu river, south of Chaungzauk) on the 20th. The few sorties after the 20th were mainly photographic reconnaissances. The Ye-U canal and Shwebo canal crossings were the principal targets photographed.

The lull continued almost throughout January with intermittent flying as and when called for. Up to 15 January, the squadron operated for 9 days only with a reduced rate of effort, putting up 42 sorties. Almost all were photographic reconnaissance sorties. The 2nd Division and the 19th Indian Division had begun their drive towards Shwebo which was eventually captured on 7 January, and information about the crossings of the Shwebo canal, including the crossings in the Hladaw area south of Shwebo and of the Moksogyon branch of the canal, and about the state of the airfields in the Shwebo area, including the Onbauk airfield east of Shwebo was secured for the army. From 16 to 28 January no call for operation was received.

The respite was brief. General Slim's plan to switch over IV Corps from the north to the south of XXXIII Corps was already being put into effect and the drive towards Meiktila was about to begin. The Japanese had made no serious attempt to prevent the Allied advance to the Irrawaddy. Instead, they took up defensive positions behind the great river. A direct frontal assault across the wide river was likely to meet with stiff resistance. The Allied Commander therefore decided to move IV Corps secretly from the left to the extreme right, gain a bridgehead near Pakokku and then strike at Meiktila, the great communication and airfield centre. As a preliminary to this move, the Lushai Brigade captured Gangaw on 12 January. The 7th Indian Division which had been allotted to IV Corps in replacement of the 19th Indian Division transferred to XXXIII Corps then took the lead, captured Tilin south of Gangaw on 23 January and Pauk, south-east of Tilin four days later. Pyinchaung on the road to Pakokku fell on the 29th. At the beginning of February, two movements took off in a southerly direction from the main road between Tilin and Pauk. Both manoeuvres aimed at diverting the Japanese attention some distance away from the proposed point of crossing the Irrawaddy at Nyaungu. One movement started from Yedu about midway between Tilin and Pauk to advance on the axis Pasok-Saw-Laungshe-Kazumna-Sidoktaya, towards Yenangyaung. At the same time another movement started moving from Thamadaw on the road between Pauk and Pyinchaung down both arms of the Nyaung Chaung on the axes Sha-Hla-Paing-Ainggyi and Ingan-Letse-Ywathit. Seikpyu was captured on 10 February and by that date Pasok also was reached. Meanwhile Lingadaw south of

INDIAN AIR FORCE

BURMA
DISPOSITIONS AS AT 24th JANUARY 1945SCALE
MILES 50 40 30 20 10 0 50 100 MILES.LEGEND

- APPROX. FRONT LINE 24 JANUARY 1945
- ROAD
— RAILWAY
— RIVER

Monywa had been occupied on 1 February and Myaing, south-west of Lingadaw on the road to Thamadaw, on 3 February. Undefended Myithche was occupied on 5 February and the stage was set for the crossing of the Irrawaddy at this place.

No. 1 Squadron was given the task of supplying the tactical reconnaissance requirements of IV Corps. Imphal being too far-off from the area of operations, the newly prepared Kan airfield north of Gangaw was selected as the new base and thither a detachment of the squadron moved in the last week of January. Operations commenced on the 29th and the squadron entered into another phase of intensive activity covering the entire area of IV Corps operations. Before the crossing of the Irrawaddy commenced on 14 February, the activities of the Squadron mainly covered the deception movements southward. The roads Kyin-Pasok-Saw-Laungshe-Kazumna Kawton-Sidoktaya-Salin, Pasok-Myeni-Pauk-Thamadaw-Pynchaung-Myeni-Sha-Hla - Ainggyi - Kyandaw - Gwebin-Seikpyu - Pyinchaung-Ingan-Latse-Gwbein-Ta-Nyaung-Zibin - Sinbyugyun - Salin - Pwinbyu and Myitche-Yenangyat-Lanywa, were constantly visited. The condition of roads, the volume and type of traffic on them, the position, size and depth of the trenches were observed and own troops located. On 30 January Allied troops were observed at Kyin and Yedu, on the 31st at Kyi, south of Tilin, on 4 February north of Ingan, on the 5th at Pasok, on the 12th just north of Yenangyat and these and other items of information were supplied to the corps and divisional headquarters.

While the area south of the Tilin-Pauk-Pyinaung line received most attention from the squadron during this period, the areas north of the line and east of the Irrawaddy were not altogether neglected. The roads Kyadet-Lingadaw-Myaing-Thamadaw, Yasagyo-Pakokku, Pyinchaung-Kandaw-Pakokku and the Pakokku area were only occasionally reconnoitred as Japanese opposition to the advance of the army in this area was negligible. The area east of the Irrawaddy demanded greater attention. The crossing of the Irrawaddy was imminent and information regarding the Japanese movements and reaction to the Allied moves southward was of paramount importance. The roads linking Nyaungu, Kyaupadaung, Taungtha and Myingyan and the various tracks in this quadrilateral namely, Letpanchibaw-Hnawdwin-Welaung, Taungzin-Hnawdwin-Kanye-Taungtha were the primary objectives. Occasionally, reconnaissances were carried farther beyond, up to Sale on the Irrawaddy in the south, Mondaing, south-west of Meiktila, and Tanaunggyin, north of Mahlaing on the Myingyan-Meiktila road. While collection of information was the primary object of these reconnaissances the Hurricanes attacked suitable targets, particularly loaded carts, whenever an opportunity occurred.

The first crossing of the Irrawaddy had, as has already been noted, taken place on 9 January at Thabeikkyin. The 19th Indian

Division followed this by another crossing at Kyaukmyaung further south. Both these bridgeheads had been immediately subjected to heavy counter-attacks but the 19th Indian Division stood firm and slowly expanded its bridgeheads. The 20th Indian Division crossed the river near the village of Allagappa on 12 February. Fighting at this bridgehead was fierce but the 20th Indian Division managed to secure a strong footing on the bridgehead. The 7th Indian Division began its crossing at Nyaungu on the night of 13 February. Further north, the 2nd Division crossed at the village of Ngazun, between Mandalay and the 20th Indian Division bridgehead on 24 February.

Progress in the 7th Indian Division sector was rapid. Pagan was captured on the 14th.⁸ The 17th Indian Division, less its airborne brigade, and 255 Tank Brigade concentrated in the 7th Division bridgehead and immediately assumed the offensive. Hnawdwin, fifteen miles on the road to Taungtha, fell to a mechanised and armoured column of this division on 21 February. Taungtha, an important maintenance centre, fell on 24 February. Thabutkon, the first of the airfields was overrun on the 26th and the 17th Indian Division's airborne brigade was flown in from Palel. The 17th Indian Division pushed forward without stopping and attacked Meiktila, where most of the important Japanese airfields were situated, on the 28th.

When the 7th Indian Division commenced crossing the Irrawaddy from Myitche on the night of 13 February this area assumed increased importance and No. 1 Squadron's activity was naturally concentrated in this region. In anticipation of the expected offensive, a detachment of the squadron had already arrived at Sinthe, north of Pyinchaung, where an airfield had been got ready by 9 February. Over Nyaungu, opposite Myitche, where the crossing was effected, and the roads, radiating from it, the squadron pilots maintained a constant patrol looking for signs of Japanese activity and swooping down to attack opportunity targets. On 14 February the squadron flew as many as 28 sorties. The number was exceeded on 16 February when a total of 32 sorties was flown. Thereafter a steady rate of effort was maintained. Allied troops were located just east of Nyaungu in the afternoon of 14 February, at Hnawdwin to the east and Taungzin to the south-east, on the 22nd two miles west of Taungtha and one mile west of Kamye on the 24th. On the 25th all types of vehicles were found moving into Taungtha and on the same day and the day after tanks were seen in action against Mahlaing. Photographs were dropped on the IV Corps headquarters at Pauk and the 7th Indian Division headquarters at Myitche.

As the offensive made progress, the squadron also extended the area of its activity. During February Pyogan, north-east of Myin-

8. 15th according to Mountbatten's Report p. 164.

gyan, Watlu, north of Natogyi, Kana, north of Pyinzi, Yewe, south-west of Myittha, were visited, the road Mahlaing-Pindale was reconnoitred and the pilots went as far south as Yenangyaung and the road Ywamun-Yenaung-Pyawbwe. In the latter half of February, operations west of Irrawaddy were on a reduced scale. The little effort that could be spared was mainly in the region of Letse and further south, including the Letse-Gwebin-Myenu-Ta-Nyaung-Zibin-Salin and Gwebin-Seikpyu roads.

In February the squadron suffered one fatal casualty. The Meiktila area was well provided with anti-aircraft defences and reconnaissances over this area at the low altitude demanded by the nature of their work exposed the aircraft to the risk of being hit by ground fire. At least four aircraft received hits and suffered more or less serious damage. The pilot of one of these, while reconnoitring between Taunggon and Mahlaing on 26 February, received a hit near his heart. He managed to fly back to the Allied lines and forced-landed. He was removed by a tank's crew and immediately rushed to the hospital where, however, he died the next day.

In early March the 17th Indian Division's assault on Meiktila met with success, the town falling on 4 March. Immediately afterwards mobile columns of infantry, guns, and armour pushed out along the roads radiating from the town. The Japanese reaction to the seizure of this vital centre through which ran their main line of communication from their base at Rangoon to the fighting area was immediate and they strained every effort to recover it without loss of time. Reinforcements were sent to Meiktila and an attack was staged on both sides of the Irrawaddy to seize the river crossing, to cut the Allied line of communication to Meiktila. The Japanese achieved some initial success in these undertakings. A strong Japanese column had already re-occupied the dominating hill massif at Taungha after the 17th Indian Division column had passed. The vital airstrip at Meiktila, two miles from the town, which was being used for the landing of supplies and reinforcements for the 17th Division was lost. The 28th East African Brigade was driven back some 13 miles to the Letse area. This was, however, about all the success that the Japanese achieved. The Allied troops kept up a relentless pressure and broke up the Japanese onslaughts. A Japanese column was routed near Singu. The strip at Meiktila was regained after fierce fighting with the aid of fighter-bombers, though it was not until 29 March that the positions from which the Japanese guns were dominating it were cleared. Meanwhile the 7th Indian Division captured Myingyan on the 23rd and the 5th Indian Division which had come all the way from Jorhat to join the fray regained Taungha on the 29th. The 5th Indian Division then swept towards Meiktila, reaching there on 3 April. On the west bank of the river Lanywa, the first of the oilfields fell to the 7th Indian Division on 31 March. On the

east bank strong patrol action went on in the Singu area to the south and towards Kyaukпадаung in the east.

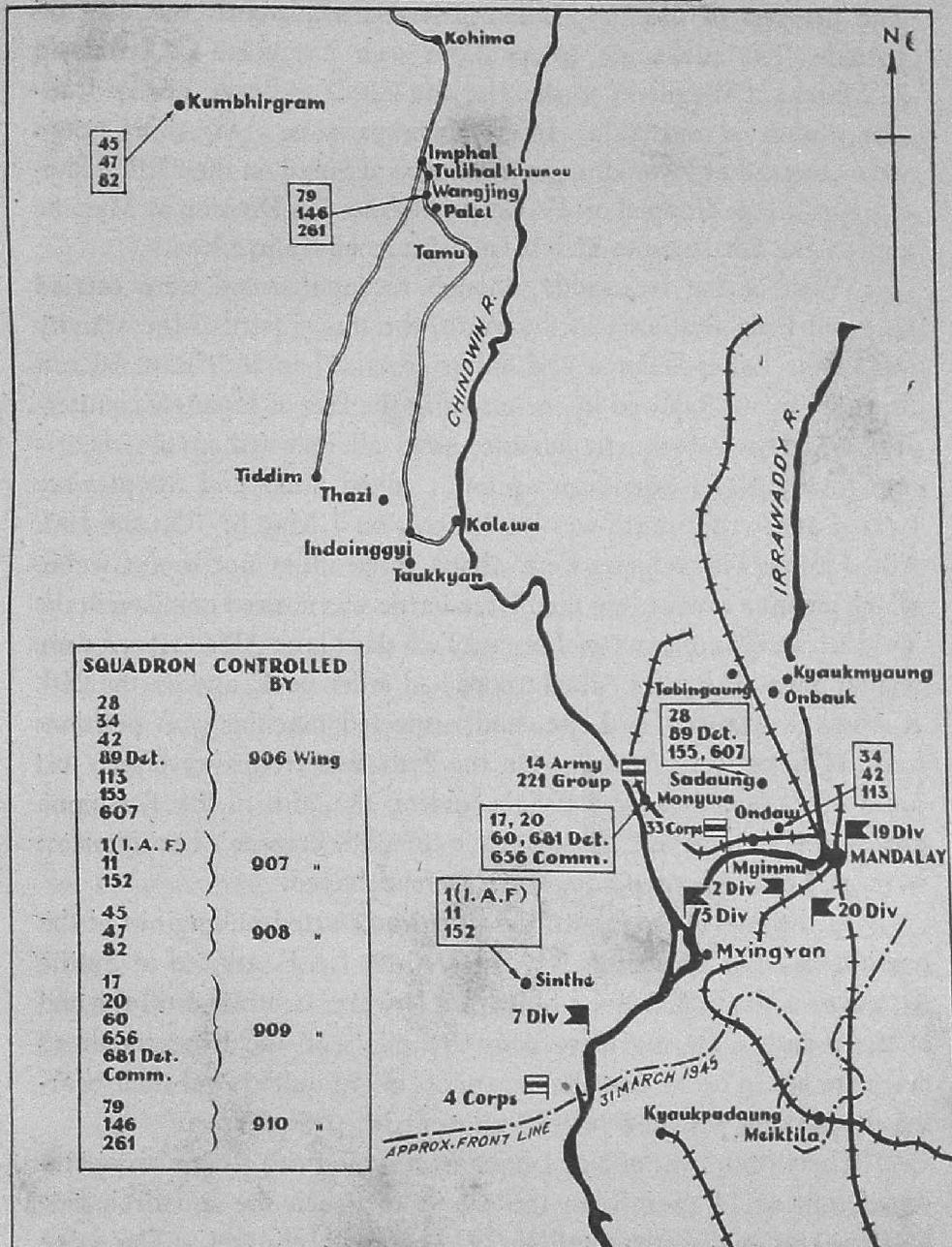
The offensive on the entire Fourteenth Army front moved on a well-arranged plan so that if the Japanese pressure increased on a particular sector, the other sectors took advantage of the corresponding reduction of opposition against them, for, the Japanese had to divert the existing strength from one front to another as the exigencies of the situation demanded. The building up of strength in the Meiktila area necessarily led to the denuding of other areas where immediately the Allied pressure increased. In the area immediately north of the zone in which IV Corps operated, the 20th Division passed to the offensive in early March. The important road centre of Myotha was taken on 12 March and Kyaukse, a Japanese maintenance base, on the main Rangoon-Mandalay road and railway, on the 30th. In the meantime a small mechanized column of the division swept south and captured Pyinzi on 20 March, Pindale the next day, and Wundwin on the 22nd. On 24 March it seized Kume. The 19th Division in the north had broken out in the first week of March from its bridgehead. It drove towards Mandalay which fell by 14 March. The 2nd Division in the meantime reached the banks of the Myitinge river south of Mandalay. One brigade entered Mahlaing west of Meiktila on 31 March.

For the whole of March, the Japanese kept up their effort to throw back IV Corps. With the Japanese adopting infiltration tactics and Allied columns moving in all directions, the fighting was necessarily confused and the army's dependence on air reconnaissance for ascertaining both allied and hostile positions and movements therefore increased. No. 1 Squadron had to be constantly in the air and flew for 618 hours during the month in spite of the fact that nine aircraft had been damaged and nine airmen injured, though none seriously, as a result of bombing by one Japanese aircraft about midnight on 4 March. The area of operations ranged from Nabuaing, north-east of Myingyan, in the north, to as far as Taungdwingyi in the south, and up to Kyaukse on the railway south of Mandalay, Thanywa south-east of Kyaukse, Yakainggyi east of Kume, Pyin-yuang north-east of Yinmabin railway station, and Yamethin down the railway to Rangoon. In addition to the regions which were reconnoitred in February, the roads which radiated from the nodal points of Myingyan, Natogyi, Pyinzi, Taungtha, Mahlaing, Pindale, Meiktila, Wundwin, Kyaukпадаung and Natmauk, were brought under constant observation. Special mention may be made of Mahlaing Nyaungok-Kokkozi-Pyinzi, Mahlaing-Shanmangge, Pyinzi-Pindale-Mahlaing, Pindale-Wundwin, Pindale-Meiktila, Myingyan-Meiktila, Myingyan-Yamethin, Wundwin-Thalun-Kume-Kyaukse, Yozon-Htandaw-Alegan-Hlaingdet-Payangazu-Yinmabin, Shwenyaungbu-Twinywa, Gwegyo-Chauk, Kyaukпадаung-Taungbi-Singu

BURMA

DISPOSITIONS AS AT 31st MARCH 1945

MILES. 50 40 30 20 10 0 SCALE 50 100 MILES.



and Gwegyo-Sale roads. The railway line Kyaukparaung-Taung-dwingyi, Kyaukse-Yamethin and Myingyan-Meiktila-Thazi-Payangazu-Yinmabin were also visited. Allied troops were observed near Meiktila on 3 March and tanks just north of Yindaw on the 9th. The progress of the 20th Indian Division southwards was also reported. The advancing troops were seen just north of Pyinzi on 20 March, at Wundwin on the 21st and 22nd, and near Thedaw railway station on the 26th. In the Kyaukparaung area, Allied troops were observed at Kyaukpingan north east of Singu on the 23rd. Photographs were dropped on IV Corps and the 7th Division at Myitche and on the 5th Division and 161st Brigade at Kamye.⁹

West of the Irrawaddy, though reconnaissances were carried upto the Pwin Byu area in the south, the major part of the activity was in the Letse, Seikpyu and Sabin areas. The 28th East African Brigade's thrust followed by its retreat in the face of Japanese counter-attack and its subsequent advance were all reflected in the reports brought by No. 1 Squadron's pilots. Allied tanks and troops were located at Gwebin north-west of Seikpyu on 1 March. On the 18th Allied troops with vehicles were about three miles north of Gwebin which meant a retreat. On the 21st, a battle was noticed going on in the Ywathit area south-east of Letse. Two days later Allied troops were seen at Ywathit itself. Allied troops had fallen back, and on the 24th Kandwin south-west of Letse, and suspected machine gun positions south of Letse were strafed. On the 25th own troops were seen just south of Ta-Nyaung, west of Sala and on the 26th in the Kazumna area south of Ainggai. All this while the 28th Brigade's headquarters were at Letse where photographs were dropped.

At the end of the month the squadron started pulling out of the operations. On 26 March No. 7 Squadron I.A.F. arrived at Sinthe to take over the task. No. 1 Squadron however continued till the end of the month. During these days the pilots of the two squadrons flew together in order that the new pilots might quickly get their bearing by working with the veteran pilots of No. 1 Squadron.

The withdrawal of No. 1 Squadron brought to a close an operational tour of 14 months in the course of which the squadron flew 4,813 operational sorties totalling 7,219 hours 45 minutes. The value and reliability of the squadron's work was recognised time and again by the army and many congratulatory messages were received. The latest was a letter from the 17th Division thanking the unit for information brought on 17 March which contributed materially to the success of the ground operations in the Pindale area. In his farewell message Air Vice-Marshall S.F. Vincent C.B., D.F.C., A.F.C., A.O.C. 221 Group paid a well-deserved compliment to both the air and ground crews of the squadron. "The reliability of their Tac/R and photo-

9. For a detailed account of the operations in Burma at this time, see *The Reconquest of Burma*, Vol. II, C.I.S. Historical Section, New Delhi.

graphic work has remained at a high level throughout, and ground crews have set a record of serviceability of aircraft which is second to none in any Air Force in the World". The squadron, specially its ground crew, deserved this praise.

Many awards had come to this squadron. The New Year Honours list included two D.F.Cs for this squadron (F/O Rai, and F/O Pandit) and F/O Rao, F/O Kak, F/O Rishi, the equipment officer W/O Tara Singh, the armament officer and F/Lt. Patwardhan, the adjutant, were all mentioned in despatches. Also mentioned in despatches was S/Ldr. Raza who was one of the squadron's former flight-lieutenants. Nor was this all. On the completion of its operational tour, four more D.F.Cs for the squadron were announced, S/Ldr. Rajaram, F/O Kak, F/O Bulsara, and F/O Gupta being the recipients. The last named was unfortunately not alive to hear of his award, having been killed in a crash near Kumbhirgram on the way back from operations. The total of D.F.Cs in the squadron was brought to seven, the other three being S/Ldr. Arjan Singh, F/O Pandit and F/O Rao.

On the withdrawal of No. 1 Squadron from Sinthe No. 7 Squadron continued the task carried out by the former. Since its withdrawal from operations in the Imphal front in June 1944, the squadron had converted from Venegeance dive-bombers to Hurricane IIC's and had been trained for fighter reconnaissance work. By the time No. 7 Squadron took over from No. 1 Squadron, the Japanese opposition in Central Burma had been completely broken. The monsoon was not far off and a drive to capture Rangoon before the monsoon was undertaken. IV Corps consisting of the 5th and 17th Divisions and 255 Tank Brigade advanced along the Meiktila-Rangoon railway axis while XXXIII Corps consisting of 268th Brigade, 2nd, 7th and 20th Divisions undertook to liquidate the Japanese west of the Meiktila-Rangoon line and drive down the line of the Irrawaddy.

Advance on the railway axis progressed satisfactorily. After the failure to recover Meiktila, the Japanese took up defensive positions at Pyawbwe. The 17th Indian Division, however, quickly broke through and after three days of sanguinary battle from 8 to 10 April captured the place. The 5th Indian Division then passed through the 17th Indian Division on 11 April and took up the march southward. Yamethin was cleared by 14 April, and Shwemyo captured two days later. Lewe airfield was seized on the 19th and the important communication centre of Toungoo fell on the 22nd without virtually any struggle. On the 23rd the Pyu bridge, 23 miles to the south, was seized.

The next Japanese stand was at Pegu for the defence of which all available forces were concentrated in that area. Even the garrison at Rangoon was moved out to defend Pegu so that from

28 April onwards there were practically no Japanese troops in or south of Rangoon. The 17th Indian Division had in the meantime taken over the advance. The outskirts of Pegu were reached on 29 April. The Japanese defensive positions on both the banks of the Pegu river were strongly held but the Division surmounted all difficulties, and by the evening of 1 May took the city.

On the XXXIII Corps front 268th Brigade and 2nd Division cleared the area Myingyan-Myotha-Pyinzi-Mahalaing-Walaing. Serious opposition at Mount Popa was overcome on 20 April. The 2nd Division was flown out to India between 11 and 25 April.

The 7th Indian Division took Kyaukpadaung on 12 April, Chauk, the second oilfield town, on the 18th and Seikpyu on the 20th. By the 21st the whole oilfield area including Yenangyaung was in Allied hands.

The 20th Indian Division moved over to the Irrawaddy axis and on 13 April captured Taungdwingyi, a vital point on the Japanese communications from the east to the Yenangyaung-Magwe area. The division then captured Magwe on 19 April. Nyaungbintha, 40 miles south-east of Magwe, was taken on 27 April and Allanmyo on the 28th.

No. 7 Squadron supported XXXIII Corps in its advance down Central Burma. The speed of the advance increased the difficulties of communication between the forward units and the headquarters in the rear. The Japanese had scattered into the jungle on either side of the Irrawaddy. Normal intelligence services were of little use and XXXIII Corps became more and more dependent on the tactical and photographic reconnaissances of No. 7 Squadron.

The squadron had begun operations on 28 March. For the first few days the pilots flew mainly with No. 1 Squadron in order to gain experience in observation of troop and vehicle movements. In the course of four days from 28 to 31 March they had 105 hours of operational flying to their credit. After the departure of No. 1 Squadron, the entire reconnaissance work in the Irrawaddy area was undertaken by No. 7 Squadron. The need for reconnaissance was great and the squadron spared no pains to meet the demands of the army. In April the pilots carried out 1,033 hours 10 minutes of operational flying, a total of 65 hours 10 minutes being flown on the 24th. This constituted a record as no other squadron in 221 Group equalled it during April.

Upto about the middle of the month the squadron's operations were confined mainly to the area bounded by Seikpyu, Singu, Kyaukpadaung, Myothit on the railway south of Natmauk and Minbu. Photographs were taken and dropped on XXXIII Corps and 7th Indian Division headquarters. Bullock carts, river-craft, bashas and troops were attacked and hit. Allied troops were located near Kyaukpadaung on the 13th, the day after it was taken, and at Chauk

on the 18th, the very day of its capture. As the month wore on and the ground troops made progress, sorties were carried farther and farther to the south. The farthest point reached was Prome which was more than 200 miles from the squadron's base at Sinthe. Most of the sorties were flown along the Irrawaddy and the entire stretch of its course from Yenangyaung to Prome was covered. Various types of rivercraft were observed and attacked. Other sorties covered the Salin and Pwin Byu areas on the west of the Irrawaddy and the road from Taungdwingyi to Allanmyo. The Allanmyo area with its two airstrips was frequently visited and the strips were found obstructed. Allied troops were contacted at Sattaw, south of Taungdwingyi on the 24th. On the 26th they were noticed held up one mile south of Pozut on the road between Sattaw and Allanmyo. West of the Irrawaddy Allied troops were seen east of Pwinbyu on the 27th and at Pwinbyu itself the next day.

On 2 May Prome was captured by the 20th Indian Division which then pushed down the road towards Rangoon. Paungde fell on 4 May, and Minhla on the 10th. In the meantime the 26th Indian Division had made a seaborne landing on 2 May and captured Rangoon unopposed on the following day. Columns of this division then moved north and established contact with the 17th Division at Hlegu, 28 miles from Rangoon on 6 May and with 20th Division on 15 May, 60 miles from Rangoon on the Prome Road.

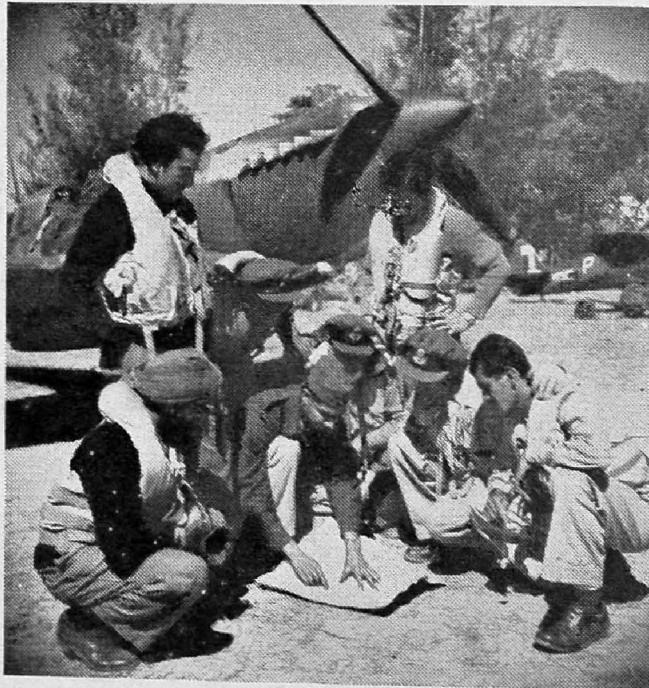
With the rapid progress of the ground troops the distance between Sinthe and the advanced line of troops was becoming more and more a handicap for the proper discharge of the squadron's commitments. The squadron therefore moved to Maida Vale, three miles from Magwe, the air party reaching the airstrip on 29 April. From here operations were carried out till 22 May after which no operations flying was undertaken due to unfavourable weather. The number of hours of operational flying in May totalled more than 754 hours. The squadron aircraft made long trips, going as far south as Bassein and Maungmya and the neighbourhood of Rangoon. Consequently the duration of the sorties increased. Many sorties of over four hours were flown, the sortie of the longest duration being flown on 11 May from 0610 to 1030 hours. The chief reconnaissance activity was over the Irrawaddy as far as Yandon and the Prome-Rangoon railway upto Taikkyi. Besides, the Henzada-Bassein and Henzada-Kyangon railways, the Bassein river and the Yenanma area south-west of Minbu were also searched for signs of traffic activity. On 11 May, 14 mechanical transports were located near Banbyin south-west of Yenanma. As the aircraft were not in a position to suitably deal with the vehicles unaided, a signal was sent and Hurricanes came and strafed them with the result that four vehicles were in flames and six were left smoking. Photographs were taken and dropped on the 20th Division which was operating in this

area. On 5 May the squadron commander flew over Rangoon which had fallen on 2 May and contacted the 26th Division. Later, on the 14th, a message was dropped on the Division.

The squadron started pulling out of Magwe on 27 May. Its tour of operations was short but so valuable had been the information brought by the pilots that when they were directed by the Group (221) to stop operations with effect from 16 May, on account of the onset of the monsoon, XXXIII Corps requested the Group Headquarters to let the squadron carry on for another ten days. The squadron continued till the 22nd after which further operations were considered inadvisable. Such was the demand for their services that there was no cessation of work for them even when the news of victory in Europe was received and there was general celebration. Air Vice-Marshal Vincent commanding 221 Group on a visit to the squadron on 15 May praised it for its excellent work and the record number of hours it had put in during April. A more tangible reward was the gift of a metal pagoda "from 33 Indian Corps with most appreciative thanks for the excellent support given during the Burma Campaign." Later in the year, in October 1945, the Commanding Officer of the Squadron, S/Ldr. P.C. Lal was awarded the D.F.C.

The squadron's fine record of service was not attained without heavy price. There were several casualties, some of them proving fatal. The first occurred on 14 April when one aircraft while on a message-dropping sortie crashed near XXXIII Corps headquarters at Pagan and the pilot was killed. He lost flying speed in a tight turn and stalled flat on the ground. It was an error of judgment. The same day two other aircraft were hit by anti-aircraft fire in the Chauk area. On 28 April another aircraft was brought down by machine gun fire over Allanmyo and went down into the Irrawaddy in flames. The same day other aircraft were badly damaged over Allanmyo by small arms fire. Two days later a pilot flying at 100 feet was shot down by Japanese anti-aircraft fire from Sadagaung hill south of Allanmyo. The aircraft caught fire and plunged into the Irrawaddy. On 15 May, another aircraft was hit while the pilot was attacking a ferry near Henzada. The pilot attempted belly-landing but the aircraft turned over on its back and he was killed.

Wg. Cdr. Majumdar, D.F.C.



Flight Commander, F-Lt. Haider briefs F/Os Thandi, Zahid, Philip, Beg, Subia, Mendoza and Aziz



Airmen servicing a
Spitfire in jungle
setting



F-Lt. N. Haider briefs
pilots preparatory to
air strike at Kangaw
valley

CHAPTER XIV

THE THIRD ARAKAN CAMPAIGN

The Preparations for the Offensive

The Second Battle of Arakan had ended with the failure of the Japanese offensive and the destruction of a large part of the attacking forces. The Allies had assumed a limited offensive as the result of which Maungdaw was firmly established as a base and the Mayu range, including the Tunnel area, was securely in Allied hands. The withdrawal of the 5th, 9th and 36th Divisions reduced the potentiality of XV Corps for offensive action and it was content with taking up positions on the Maungdaw-Buthidaung line for the duration of the monsoon. At the end of May 1944, XV Corps comprised three divisions disposed as follows: The 25th Division was in the Tunnel area covering the Maungdaw-Buthidaung road, one brigade of the 26th Division was in the area Bawli-Goppe-Taung Bazar, another at Taung Bro and the third at Cox's Bazar. The 81st West African Division was withdrawn from the Kaladan Valley and was concentrating at Chiringa.

During the monsoon period, XV Corps operations were confined almost entirely to patrolling and small local offensives. Hence little close air support for the army was required but tactical and offensive reconnaissances by Hurricanes and Spitfires of 224 Group over the areas immediately behind the main Japanese lines continued despite unfavourable weather. Beaufighters and Mosquitos ranged farther afield attacking railway rolling stock and river traffic in Central Burma and all routes along which the Japanese could bring supplies to mount an offensive in the Arakan after the monsoon.

No. 6 Squadron I.A.F. had been withdrawn from Arakan on the eve of the monsoon. But two Indian squadrons, Nos. 4 and 9, remained throughout the monsoon to hold the Indian Air Force line of battle in this area. No. 4 Squadron had started operations from Feni at the end of March but at the end of June it started moving to Cox's Bazar to relieve No. 6 Squadron. Operations from Cox's Bazar started on 7 July. During July 219 sorties were flown in the course of which tactical, contact, photographic and offensive reconnaissances were carried out over the entire Arakan front and occasionally over Akyab Island. On the very first day of its operation bashas in Mayu valley and Satwin area and sampans on the Kaladan river were strafed. On 10 July gun-pits were located in Seinnyinbya area. On the 27th and the 28th offensive reconnaissances were carried out over Oktaung, Buthidaung, Sinoh and Rathedaung areas and

reports received from the "V" Force confirmed that many bashas were destroyed and several Japanese were killed and wounded in these attacks. Many sampans were also sunk in those areas.

During August, the Hurricanes of the squadron were fitted with bomb racks to carry 1,000 lbs. of bombs, two 250-pounders or one 500-pounder under each wing. The month's total amounted to 390 operational sorties involving 467 hours of flying. 20,250 lbs. of bombs were dropped and 30,397 rounds of ammunition fired on various targets including bashas, hill features and river-craft. On 2 August a wooden jetty was strafed in the Indin-Sinoh area. One aircraft led four Spitfires on 18 August for a strike against a strong timber bridge which was destroyed. Besides, photographs were taken of several areas and dropped on XV Corps headquarters.

In September the weather improved considerably and this was reflected in the intensification of air as well as ground operations. No. 4 Squadron flew a total of 454 sorties involving nearly 660 hours. On 1 September while on a tactical reconnaissance in Htizwe-Kanzauk area, the aircrew noticed some newly-constructed bashas and a possible gun-emplacement. These were strafed and destroyed. Some tracks, when followed, led to the discovery of well-concealed bashas in Mraw Chaung which were bombed and damaged. Strafing and bombing of bashas, river-craft, suspected gun-positions etc. continued throughout the month and the places visited included Myinhlut, Kyaukpandu and Sinbaik on the west coast, Hponnyoleik, Dodan north of Hparabyin, Mraw Chaung north-east of Htizwe, Htizwe, Atetnanra west of Htizwe, Thaungdara, Sinoh, Kanbyin, Alechaung east of Mozi river, Sabyingyi etc. in the Mayu valley, and Kinthe, Kyauktaw, Kanzauk, Kwazon, Teinnyo and Myohaung in the Kaladan valley. Roads connecting the coast with the Mayu valley and the latter with the Kaladan valley were kept under careful watch and all suspected targets attacked. The photographs taken by the squadron provided valuable information of concealed tracks, trenches, vehicles, and gun-positions. Movement of Japanese troops was reported and contact was established with Allied forward troops and messages and photos were dropped for their benefit. On several occasions the pilots reported that certain villages, hill features, and chaungs marked on the maps did not exist at all. This information, when confirmed, helped in the preparation of plans for operations.

The other I.A.F. squadron, No. 9, operated in Arakan for part of its time only until September when it moved to Cox's Bazar and was entirely concerned with this theatre. Its work from Singerbil including that carried out in Arakan has already been discussed in Chapter XII. On 1 September twelve Hurricanes of the squadron arrived at Cox's Bazar and started operations on the day following. Atet Nanra was strafed on the 2nd and a bridge at Apaukwa was

damaged on the 4th. About the middle of September, the Hurricanes of the squadron were fitted with bomb racks to enable them to function in a fighter-bomber role. The squadron left for Hathazari between 20 and 23 September. A detachment was however left at Cox's Bazar and carried on operations, though on a limited scale. Rivercraft on the Kalapanzin river and bashas in Praindaung, Aungze-Ya and Alewet-Magwe areas were attacked and many destroyed. On 28 September, thirteen aircraft operating from Hathazari carried out a very successful strike on bashas and entrenchments in the Buthidaung area in the course of which an ammunition dump was blown up.

By the end of September it became possible to start a limited land offensive. During October, the 26th Indian Division drove back a Japanese flank attack on Taung Bazar ; the 25th Indian Division, on the Maungdaw-Buthidaung line, drove the Japanese from their remaining positions immediately south of the Tunnel area ; the 81st West African Division, moving south-east to Paletwa, was deployed in the Kaladan valley by the end of October and advancing south down both the banks of the Kaladan river was two miles from Kaladan village on 30 November.

In October, No. 4 Squadron flew 336 sorties totalling nearly 440 hours. It operated on either side of the Mayu range and in the upper Kaladan valley. West of the Mayu range, Seinnyinbya and Hparabyin areas were bombed. An attack on 4 October on bashas in Seinnyinbya area was followed by a big explosion. East of the range, the targets included Dabrugeyaung, south-east of Buthidaung, which was bombed on the 23rd and Thaungdara which was bombed and strafed on the 25th and 28th. Besides, watercraft on the Mayu river were also attacked and Alechaung area was bombed and strafed on the 22nd. The majority of the sorties was in support of the advance of the 81st West African Division. Tactical reconnaissances were carried out in Kaletwa-Daletme-Paletwa area and occasionally as far as Kyauktaw and Myohaung. Indian troops were seen moving east from Goppe Bazar on the 12th and crossing the Matamuhari river on the 13th. Most of the strikes were directed against Labawa, it being attacked on the 6th, 9th, 12th, 13th, 14th and the 16th. Targets were on some occasions indicated by smoke shells. On the 12th a dummy attack was staged to enable own troops to move forward unopposed. Several sorties were flown to drop messages at Daletme, Ngasha, south of Daletme, and Singpa.

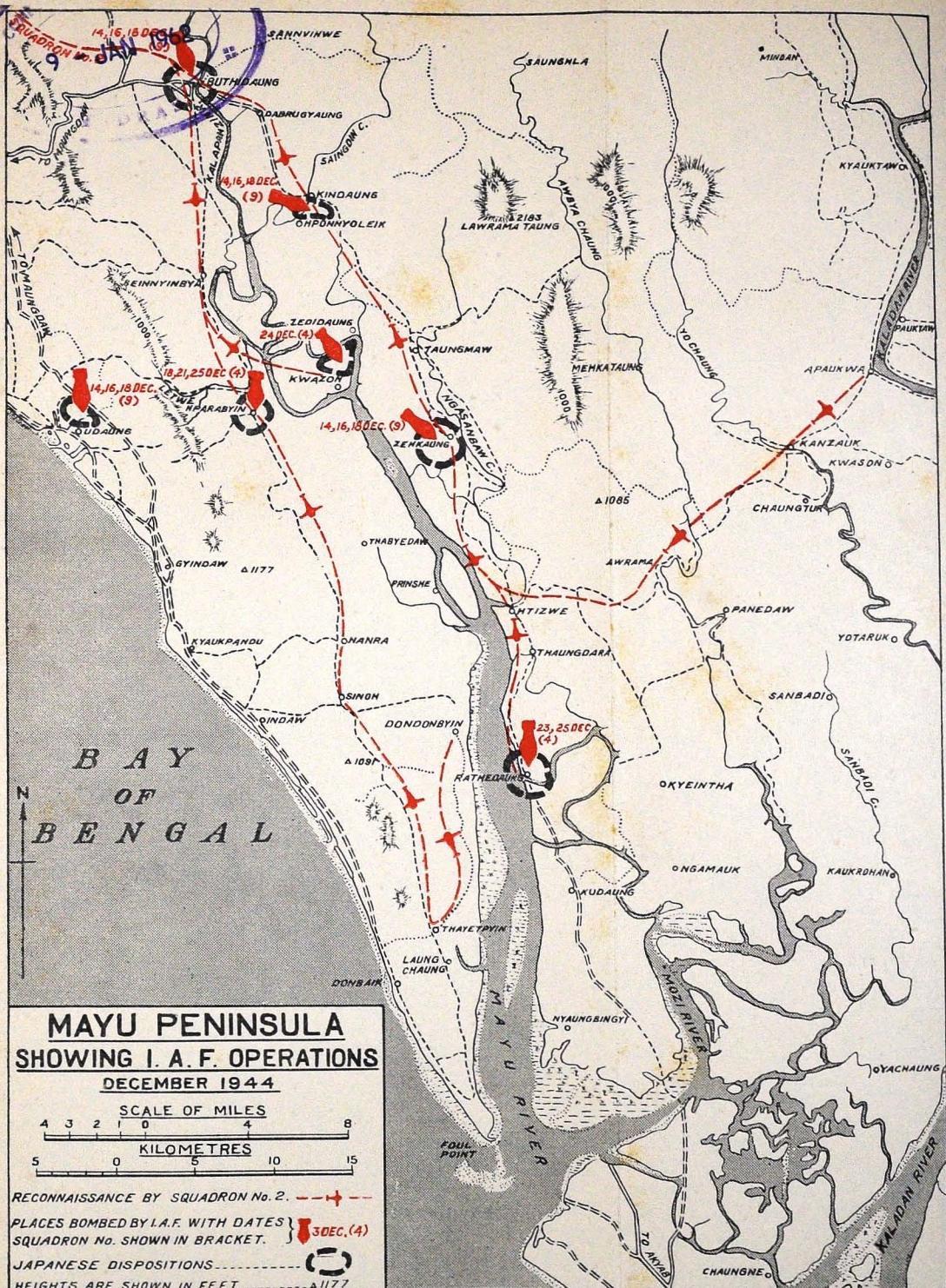
In November the number of sorties registered an increase, 380 sorties totalling nearly 500 hours being flown. Activity in the Mayu area was meagre. Besides occasional bombing sorties, several photographic reconnaissances were flown and leaflets were dropped on Hparabyin, Thaungdara and Kindaung. The Kaladan valley received much more attention. The Paletwa area was repeatedly

bombed and river-craft on the Kaladan river attacked. Reconnaissance missions were carried out further forward over Kyauktaw-Minbya road, over Thayettabin, Teinnyo and Myohaung. Besides, rafts and boats on the Lemro river were strafed on the 18th and Myohaung bombed on the 20th.

No. 9 Squadron also was quite active during these months. It was based on Hathazari but for operational purposes the airfield at Cox's Bazar was used. Before the ground offensive started in earnest in December, the squadron's rate of effort was rather moderate, the number of sorties in October and November being 126 and 164 respectively. Its work in October was mainly in the Mayu area ; places attacked included Sinoh, Mraw Chaung area, Kalachaung, Hparabyin, Dabrugyaung, Zadidaung and Thaungdara. The first bombing mission was carried out on the 22nd when Kalachaung was bombed. On the 23rd an ammunition dump at Dabrugyaung was bombed resulting in the death of several Japanese and injury to others. A bombing attack on Zadidaung the same day caused an explosion following which the village was evacuated. Thaungdara was bombed on the 25th and the two succeeding days. Following the third day's attack an ammunition dump exploded. In the Kaladan valley Labawa, which was No. 4 Squadron's main target during the middle of October, was attacked by No. 9 Squadron also, on the 15th, 16th and 17th.

In November the Buthidaung area received less attention. The only attacks were against the Japanese positions north of Buthidaung on the 6th and supply dumps at Dabrugyaung on the 8th. The latter attack was followed by an explosion. Besides, on 5 November, launches in Akyab harbour were strafed and some direct hits scored. The most bombed area was Paletwa and its approaches from the north, south and west which received almost daily visits from No. 9 Squadron. A position north of Kaladan was bombed on the 9th and a pagoda west of Myohaung on the 28th. Besides, offensive reconnaissances of various waterways including the Kaladan river, Lemro river, Lower Mayu, Akyab Chaung, Pi Chaung and chaungs east of Kaladan were carried out.

The paucity in the number of sorties by this squadron was more than made up by the accuracy of the strikes and on many occasions it received commendatory messages from ground forces. The attack on Teimagyaung, north-west of Paletwa, was described by the 81st West Africans as very successful and a message from XV Corps reported that the air strike facilitated the occupation of the Japanese positions. Attacks on the dump at Dabrugyaung on the 8th and on positions north of Kaladan village were also reported as very accurate. Another message from the West Africans said that the bombing on the 23rd enabled them to capture a vital Japanese position west of Paletwa.



The Offensive Begins

The Arakan offensive began in earnest in December 1944. The objective was to capture the Mayu Peninsula, Akyab and Ramree Island. The operations would contain the Japanese in the Arakan and prevent them from crossing the Arakan Yoma and interfering with the advance of the Fourteenth Army. The capture of Arakan would release three out of the four Allied divisions for employment elsewhere. The most important consideration of all was that the capture of the Akyab and Ramree airfields would give the Allies air bases from where transport aircraft could carry supplies to the Fourteenth Army advancing along the Railway Corridor and the Irrawaddy valley.

The Arakan Campaign was one continuous series of combined operations. The navy and the air force co-operated with the army all through this offensive which started in mid-December in the Mayu and the Kaladan valleys and virtually ended with the capture of Taungup in the third week of April. This theatre saw the strongest concentration of the I.A.F. squadrons, as many as six out of a possible nine being engaged here during this campaign. No. 4 and No. 9 Squadrons were already in this area. No. 2 Squadron arrived at Mambur at the end of November 1944 and started operations on 1 December. It was a fighter reconnaissance squadron. Its task was to collect information regarding Japanese activity by visual observation or by means of photographs and convey the same to the ground forces by message or photo drops. Besides, other tasks viz., strafing, acting as pathfinder to other aircraft, observation of the results of bombing etc. were also undertaken. No. 2 Squadron carried on operations till 17 May.

The next I.A.F. squadron to arrive was No. 10. It arrived at Ramu in December 1944 and commenced operations on the 23rd. It became the third Hurri-bomber squadron in Arakan, the other two being No. 4 and No. 9. It continued operations till 18 April 1945.

The only Spitfire squadron in the I.A.F., No. 8, came to the air strip "George," fifteen miles south of Cox's Bazar, towards the end of December and started operations on 3 January 1945. It was in this theatre only for a short while, being withdrawn in the last week of February to Baigachi for the defence of the Calcutta area.

The last Indian squadron to arrive was No. 3, which reached Bawli North by 20 January 1945 and started operations on 4 February. It operated as a Hurri-bomber squadron till 19 April.

Mayu Peninsula

The Arakan offensive was opened on 12 December in the Mayu Peninsula by the 25th Indian Division, supported by the 81st West African Division in the Kaladan valley and the 82nd West African

Division, which had replaced the 26th Indian Division, in the Kalapanzin valley. The main thrust was made down the coast. The 74th Brigade of the 25th Indian Division, depending entirely on sea-borne supplies, advanced on the coast rapidly, occupied Indin on 21 December, Donbaik on the 23rd and reached Foul Point on 26 December. The 53rd Brigade of this Division in the meantime occupied Seinnyinbya on 18 December and Kwazon seven miles south of Buthidaung, on the 21st. The 82nd West African Division captured Buthidaung on 15 December and then crossed the Kalapanzin river and occupied Kindaung on the 19th. Zadidaung was approached on the 22nd. One battalion of the 53rd Brigade drove on to Pyinshe, west of the Mayu river, seven miles south of Kwazon, and crossed to Htizwe on the east bank on the 29th. Two days later they occupied Rathedaung unopposed. On the same day another battalion occupied Kudaung Island.

Three I.A.F. squadrons, Nos. 2, 4 and 9, co-operated with the ground forces during these operations. No. 2 Squadron flew many sorties over the Mayu valley in pursuance of its primary task of collecting information regarding Japanese activity in this area. The places visited included Buthidaung, Seinnyinbya, Hparabyin, Nanra, Kwazen, Htizwe, Thaungdara, Rathedaung, etc. The tracks Buthidaung - Kindaung - Taungmaw - Htizew, Htizwe - Awrama - Kanzauk-Apaukwa, Hparabyin-Sinoh, and Thayetpin-Dondonbin were closely observed. The Mayu river and the chaungs were watched for signs of rivercraft.

While No. 2 Squadron supplied the tactical information regarding the battle area, No. 4 and No. 9 Squadrons operated in direct support of the ground forces. No. 4 Squadron's operations were chiefly in the second half of December after the offensive had been launched. Hparabyin, which was a Japanese strong point and its neighbourhood were bombed on the 18th, 21st and 25th, Rathedaung was strafed on the 23rd and gun positions north-east of Kwazon (captured on the 21st) were bombed on the 24th.

During the same period No. 9 Squadron carried out many night rhubarbs in the Mayu river and Ngasanbaw Chaung against watercraft. Japanese positions north of Udaung on the coast were attacked, on the 7th, those in the Letwe Chaung west of Hparabyin on the 23rd and north-east of Kwazon on the 25th. In the 82nd West African-Division area the Japanese had built up strong defensive positions south of Kindaung which were holding up the advance of the Africans. These were attacked on the 20th. On the 22nd the target was a nest of Japanese mortars and machine-guns near Hponnyoleik in the same area. The strike was, according to a message received from the West Africans, very effective. Besides, counter-battery patrols were carried out in Buthidaung area on the 12th and the 13th, dumps at Zehkaung, south-east of Kwazon and suspected Japanese headquarters,

**KALADAN VALLEY
SHOWING I.A.F. OPERATIONS**

DECEMBER 1944 TO JANUARY 1945

SCALE OF MILES

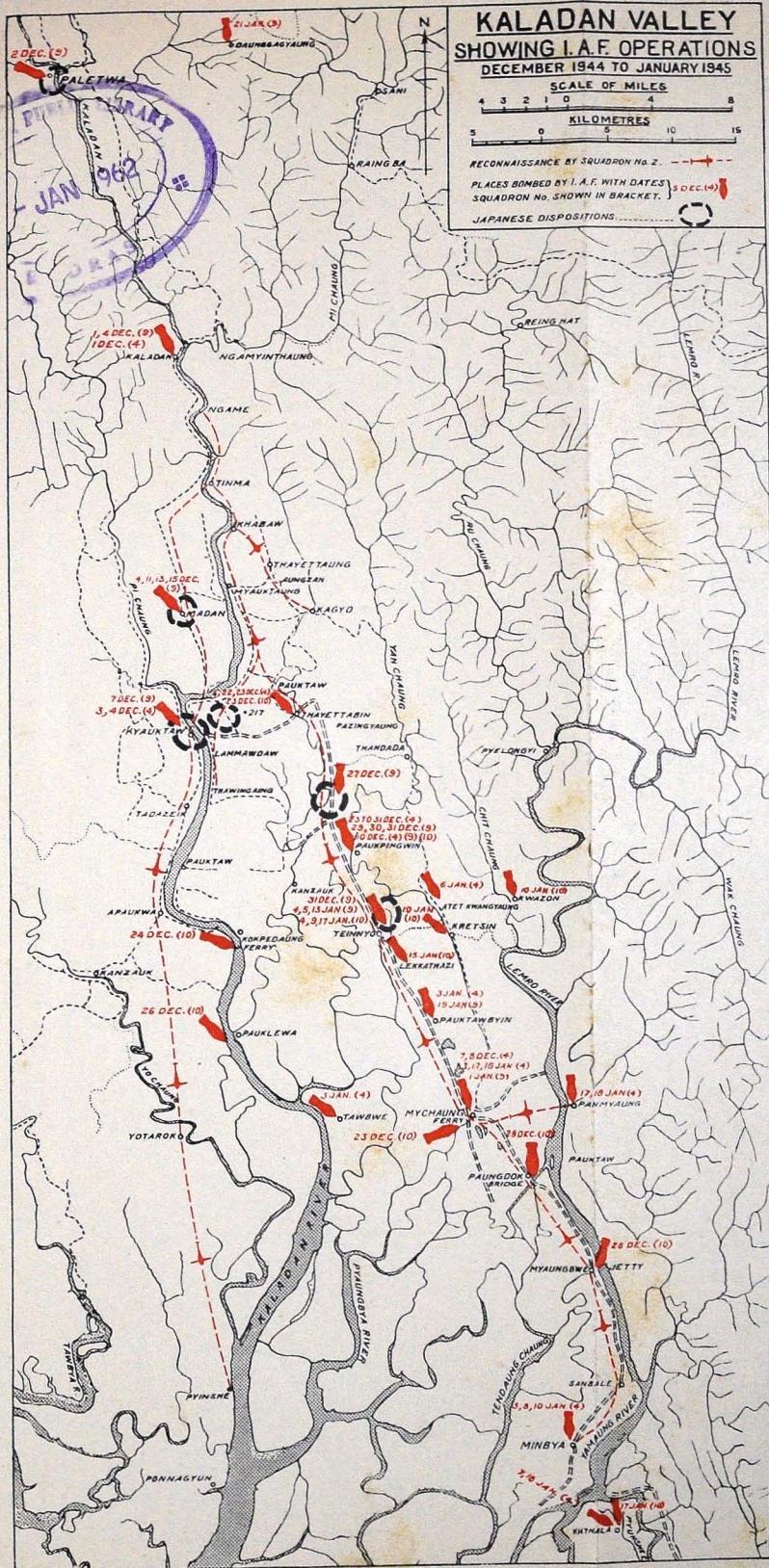
4 3 2 1 0 4 8
KILOMETRES

5 0 5 10 15

RECONNAISSANCE BY SQUADRON NO. 2. - - - - -

PLACES BOMBED BY I.A.F. WITH DATES } 5 DEC. (4)
SQUADRON NO. SHOWN IN BRACKET.

JAPANESE DISPOSITIONS. - - - - -



south-east of Dabrugyaung and at Hparabyin were bombed on the 14th, 16th and 18th respectively.

Besides these three squadrons, No. 10 Squadron also flew several sorties over the Mayu valley on the 25th during which the jetty and the warehouse in the northern end of Rathedaung were strafed.

Kaladan Valley

In the Kaladan valley the 81st West African Division, depending on air supply, was also making good progress. It crossed the Pi Chaung on 9 December and, after repulsing a Japanese counter-attack, reached south-east of Tinma on the 20th and Thandada, six miles south-east of Thayettabin, by-passing the Japanese positions north of Thayettabin, on the 22nd. The Japanese then concentrated west of point 317, an isolated feature east of Thayettabin-Myohaung road. Despite three days saturation bombing from 29 to 31 December and ground attacks supported by air strikes this feature held out till 9 January.

At this stage the 4th Brigade of 82nd West African Division moving via Kanzauk reached Apaukwa on 9 January and came under the command of the 81st West African Division for further operations to capture Myohaung. On 10 January the 81st Division was fighting in the hills 15 miles north-north-west of Myohaung. The drive towards Myohaung began on 15 January. By the 19th Teinnyo, six miles north of Myohaung was captured. There was strong resistance by the Japanese but a two-pronged thrust—by the 82nd West African Division from the west and by the 81st West African Division from the north—resulted in the capture of Myohaung on 25 January. The 82nd West African Division further resumed the offensive and occupied Minbya on 2 February.

Priority of air support was given to the 81st West African Division until 12 January. From this date until the capture of Myohaung they had normal air support but the amount decreased considerably as the Japanese withdrew from the area.

Four I.A.F. squadrons, Nos. 2, 4, 9, and 10 lent their support in the Kaladan campaign. No. 2 Squadron's pilots visited many places including Ngame, south-east of Kaladan village, Tinma, Kyauktaw Pyinsha, Yotarok, Khabaw, Lammadaw, Pauktaw, north-west of Thayettabin, Thayettabin, Teinnyo, Panmyaung, Myohaung, and Sanbale, on the Lemro, north-east of Minbya. The Lammadaw-Thayettabin-Myohaung road and the tracks Khabaw-Myauktaung-Thayettaung-Aungzan-Kagyo, Leikma, Tadazeik, Kagyo-Pazing-aung east of Thayettabin, Thayettabin-Pauktaw, Myohaung-Panmyaung, etc., Kaladan and Lemro rivers and many chaungs were closely watched. The squadron's watchful eyes were chiefly on roads and tracks. Information as to their usability, the kind of transport they were capable of taking, the condition of the bridges, and the transport seen on the roads, was gathered with special care. Besides, the

squadron watched rivers and chaungs for watercraft, located gun positions, spotted trenches, observed whether bashas were occupied or not, whether a ferry was in use or whether a chaung was fordable and if so by what kind of transport. Some typical pieces of information brought by the squadron's pilots may be noted here. On 10 December an air-strip capable of taking Dakotas was noticed east of Khabaw. The ferries at Lammadaw and Thawingaing about 4 miles south visited on the 14th showed signs of little use. The terminals of both the ferries were very muddy and no landing stage was seen on either bank of the river. On the 25th the girders on the east side of the Myohaung bridge were found damaged and a large hole observed. By-passing tracks were seen as also two metal poles driven into the chaung bed. Strafing was also carried out against bashas, rivercraft and road transport. No. 2 Squadron operated in the Kaladan valley up to 5 January after which other areas required its services. Later in the month, however, the squadron frequently carried out reconnaissances in the Minbya area. The Lemro river and the tracks running eastwards from it were also occasionally visited.

The other three squadrons provided direct support to the West Africans. No. 4 Squadron's pilots bombed the Kaladan area on 1 December, Kyauktaw on the 3rd and 4th scoring hits on the jetty, Thayettaline area on the 6th and bridges and watercraft in Mychaung area on the 7th and 8th. No. 9 Squadron's efforts during this period were in the area extending from Paletwa in the north to Kyauktaw and Teinnye in the south. Japanese positions near Kaladan village were bombed on the 1st and 4th December, those east of Paletwa on the 2nd, in Madan on the 4th and in Kyauktaw on the 7th. Japanese troops and mechanical transport north of Kyauktaw, troops being ferried from Kyauktaw to Lammadaw, and a Japanese observation post north-east of Madan were attacked on the 11th, 13th and 15th respectively. On the 21st a bombing mission was sent to Daung-gayaung east of Paletwa.

No. 10 Squadron commenced its operations on 23 December. From this day until 11 January 1945 it was engaged mainly in the Kaladan valley. Dislocation of the communication system was the special assignment for the squadron and the targets included bridges, ferries and jetties in this area. The first day's target was Thayettabin bridge which received one direct hit while other bombs fell on the target area. Lammadaw ferry was bombed next day (24th), Mychaung ferry on the 26th, Wadang and Kokpedaung ferries on the 27th and Pauklewa ferry south of Kokpedaung, Paungdok bridge south-east of Mychaung and Myaungbew jetty on the Lemro on the 28th. As a result of these attacks fourteen 250-lb. bombs landed on the Mychaung jetty, and the Paungdok bridge was destroyed.

Towards the end of December the Paukpingwin area was the scene of great activity. The West Africans had by-passed the

Japanese positions north of Thayettabin and had approached the vital Thayettabin-Mychaung road south of it from the north-east. The Japanese reacted strongly to this threat to their principal line of communication and offered desperate resistance from a strong point east of the road. Six squadrons of Mitchells plastered the position with bombs. No. 4 Squadron attacked the Japanese battery headquarters and administrative area, supply dumps, etc. in Thayettabin area on the 22nd and 23rd. From 27th to 31st daily attacks were carried out in the Paukpingwin area. No. 9 Squadron attacked Japanese gun positions, dumps and headquarters midway between Thayettabin and Teinnyo on the 29th. Other attacks were made to prevent Japanese movements and a re-grouping of their forces. The hill feature north of Paukpingwin was bombed on the 29th and 30th. On the 31st Teinnyo and Paukpingwin villages were bombed and several fires started. Besides Nos. 4 and 9 Squadrons, the aircraft of No. 10 Squadron also dropped their bombs on the hill feature above referred to on 10 December. Twelve aircraft flew two missions against the feature which was again attacked next day by twenty-one aircraft. On the 31st the southern part of Paukpingwin received twenty-two bombs while Siernyo village near Teinnyo received twenty.

For the greater part of January the efforts of the three I.A.F. squadrons continued to be employed in support of the 81st West African Division. While the West Africans were weak in artillery, the Japanese were amply provided with guns. The air force was called upon to make up for this deficiency of the West Africans and at the same time to neutralise the Japanese superiority. Priority of air support had therefore to be given to the West Africans at the beginning of January. No. 4 Squadron's activity ranged from Teinnyo in the north to Kethala in the south. On 3 January bombs were dropped on the jetty area at Myohaung and Minbya, on Tawbwe and Pauktawabyin. Atet Kwaunyaung, north-east of Teinnyo, was bombed on the 6th, Kethala on the 7th and 18th, Minbya on the 8th and 10th, Panmyaung and Myohaung on the 17th and 19th. No. 9 Squadron bombed Myohaung jetty on 1 January, Japanese positions north-east of Teinnyo on the 4th, 5th and 13th. In the attack on the 13th when Kwanyaung was the target 500-lb. bombs were dropped by the squadron for the first time. The strike was accurate and enabled the West Africans to capture the position. On 14 January, six aircraft of the squadron and twelve aircraft of No. 10 Squadron moved to Paukpingwin an advance strip so that they could operate to cover a brigade advancing over open country to put in a "hook" south-east of Teinnyo. While No. 9 carried out counterbattery patrols in the area south and south-east of Teinnyo to keep the Japanese guns quiet, No. 10's aircraft carried out an attack on the 15th against a pagoda east of Lekkathazi believed to be a Japanese store, and a position east of Teinnyo on the 17th. No. 10 Squadron carried

out another attack against a hill feature east of Teinnyo which was again holding up the army's advance. The target was indicated by smoke and sixteen bombs found their mark. Ten aircraft of No. 9 Squadron bombed a feature north of Pauktawbyin dominating the road to Mychaung on the 19th. From 17 January onwards several attacks were directed against Kethala on the Pyunshe Chaung, south-east of Minbya, an important point in the Japanese escape route and the village was reduced to shambles.

Besides the sorties mentioned above, No. 10 Squadron had carried out many attacks earlier in the month in the Teinnyo area. On the 4th were bombed some hill features north-east of Teinnyo. On the 9th the target was another hill feature east of Teinnyo. Next day the Japanese positions in Kretsin village, east of Teinnyo, and the ferry on Chit Chaung at Kawazon east-north-east of Teinnyo were attacked. On the 13th the village Kyaukngnaw received a strike which was reported by the West Africans to be accurate.

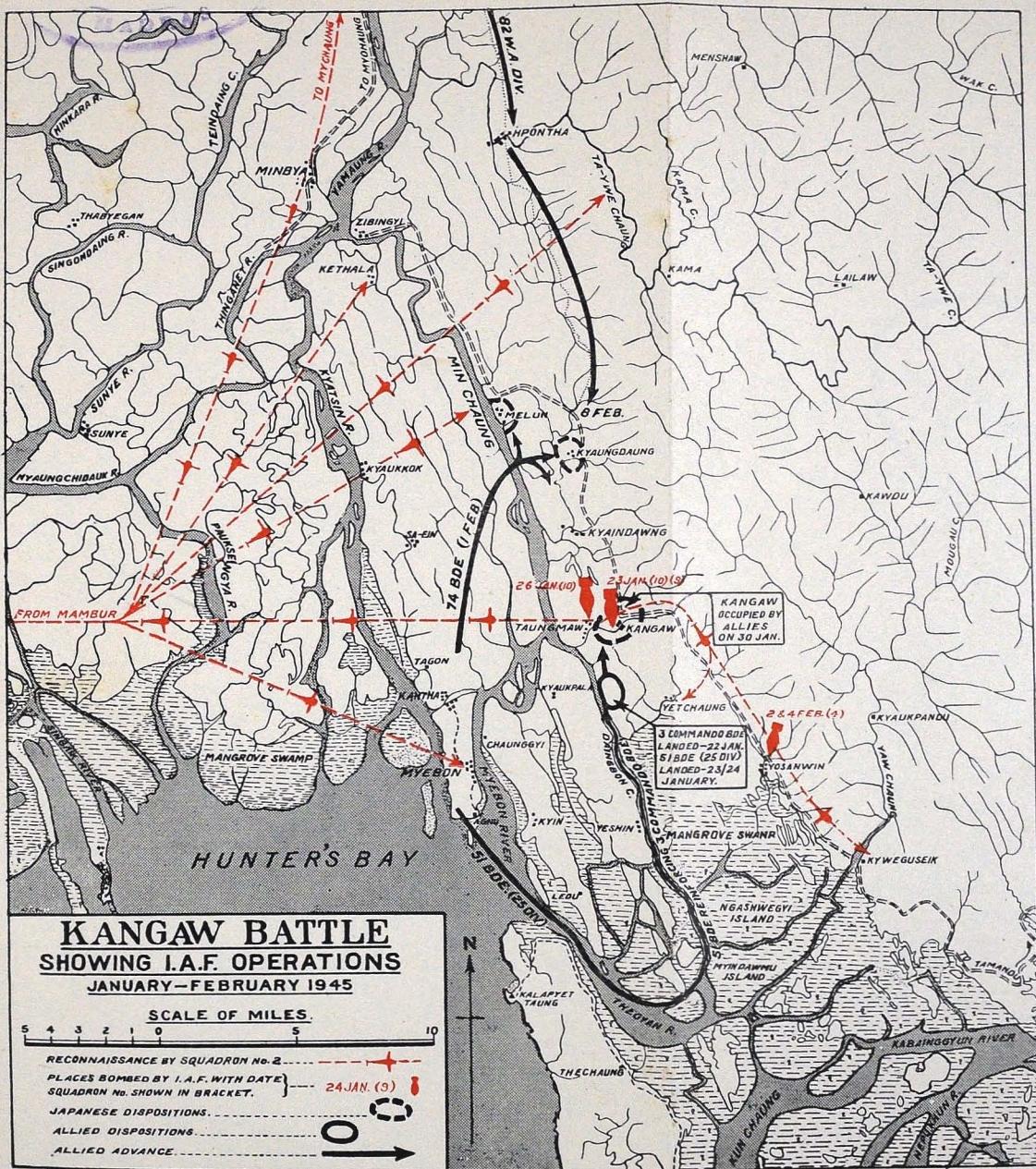
Akyab

The landing at Akyab was fixed for 3 January. 3 Commando Brigade mounted in the Naf River carried out a landing on the north-western beaches of the island. Simultaneously 53 Brigade crossed from Kudaung Island and 74 Brigade was ferried from Foul Point. Neither landing was opposed and Akyab town was occupied on the 4th. The Japanese had evacuated the island 48 hours prior to the landing and had proceeded to Ponnagyun on the west bank of the Kaladan river. Two battalions of 53 Brigade followed them and forced them to the other side of the river on 9 January. These battalions in turn crossed the river and reached the Thinganet river at a point four miles south-west of Minbya.

Information had been received prior to the landings that the Japanese had left the island. But the assault landing took place according to plan except the preliminary bombardment. No. 2 Squadron flew some reconnaissance sorties over the island to discover hostile movement, if any, but those were not pursued as they were found unnecessary. No. 8 Squadron's Spitsfires, lately arrived, flew their first sorties over Akyab. On 3 January and the three days following, the squadron carried out defensive patrols over the island and particularly over the beaches where the Allied troops were landing and over shipping anchored offshore. As the landing was unopposed, the work was uneventful. The squadron switched on to other work when it was clear that the area was safe.

Myebon

On 12 January 3 Commando Brigade and 74 Brigade of the 25th Indian Division, under cover of a smoke screen and supported by naval and air bombardment made a successful landing on the



Myebon Peninsula from Akyab. The Japanese counter-attacked and a week of severe fighting followed in which the Allied troops pushed towards Kantha and captured it on 17 January and secured the Myebon Peninsula.

A fair amount of opposition to the landing had been anticipated. Accordingly the landing was preceded by a heavy attack on the Japanese defensive positions by 48 Mitchells and 25 Thunderbolts. Subsequently close air support was provided by Thunderbolts and Hurricanes, while Lightnings and Spitfires maintained fighter cover and attacked ground targets.

On the day of landing No. 4 Squadron laid a smoke screen to cover the landing, this being the first operational use of smoke, in this command. The smoke laying was carried out under difficulties as naval shelling was taking place at the time and the smoke had to be laid with great care. Several smoke bombs failed to explode. On the same day a strike by the Squadron resulted in the destruction of both the end spans of the bridge at Kantha, north of Myebon. A village north of Kantha was bombed on the 13th and the bridge at Kyaindawng north of Kangaw destroyed on the 14th.

No. 2 Squadron carried out reconnaissance over the area, and No. 9 and 10 Squadrons provided direct support and had already attacked Myebon, Kantha, and the jetty at Melun on the Min Chaung on the 8th in anticipation of the landing. On the 12th, bombing and low-level strafing missions were flown in support of the landing. Subsequently, on the 16th, a Japanese observation post west of Kantha was bombed.

No. 10 Squadron attacked the village of Myebon on the 12th. The same day an attack against Kantha bridge was not successful. Myebon village was bombed again the next day. Further missions were flown in Myebon area on the 16th and 18th.

Kangaw.

After the Myebon Peninsula and the mouth of the Myebon river were sealed off, the next objective was to cut off the road which runs north and south through Kangaw. A series of strong Japanese defences existed in Kangaw area effectively blocking any advance to Kangaw from the north and north-west. A water approach through the Thegyan river and then north up the Daingbon Chaung to a selected landing place two miles south-west of Kangaw village was therefore decided upon as most likely to achieve tactical surprise. The 3rd Commando Brigade made a landing here on 22 January according to plan.

Kangaw village was surrounded by a series of strongly defended hill features. Between the beach-head and the village there were a 170-ft. high feature known as Hill 170 or Brighton, a smaller ridge named Milford to its east, and a knife-edged hill known as Pinner

further to the east. Close to Pinner, to the south-east, was the feature Berwick. Just to the west of the village was a feature known as Dunns. Two massive features known as Perth and Melrose guarded the village from the north and east respectively.

Just before the landing two squadrons of Mitchells (B 25) bombed a fortified hill dominating the landing point. The Commandos occupied Hill 170 by the morning of the 23rd and also occupied Milford and Pinner. The Japanese quickly reacted to this threat directed against the only escape route for the vehicles and guns of their forces in the north. The commandos were continuously counter-attacked during the next 48 hours but stood their ground. On the night of 23/24 January 51 Brigade of the 25th Indian Division landed. On 25 January, a three day air offensive was arranged to soften up the main hill features commanding the road. The bombing was accurate and 51 Brigade attacked on the 28th. One battalion attacked Dunns and had some initial success but was later withdrawn due to heavy Japanese shelling. Another battalion secured a footing on Melrose which was captured on the 29th. Kangaw village was occupied on 30 January and the road was finally cut. Meanwhile, 82nd W.A. Div. was making rapid progress southward through Hpon-tha driving the Japanese up against the Kangaw block. To ensure safe passage of their comrades moving down the road from Minbya, the Japanese in Kangaw area attacked Brighton on 31 January and the following two days but were repulsed with severe loss.

On 1 February part of 74 Brigade crossed the Min Chaung from the Myebon Peninsula and launched operations against the Japanese positions at Melun, Smoukron and Kyaingdawang. By 8 February a brigade of the 82nd W.A. Division was 9 miles north of Kangaw. The Japanese still remained on the Fingers, Perth and Dunns. Dunns was cleared of the Japanese on 11 February and Perth the next day.

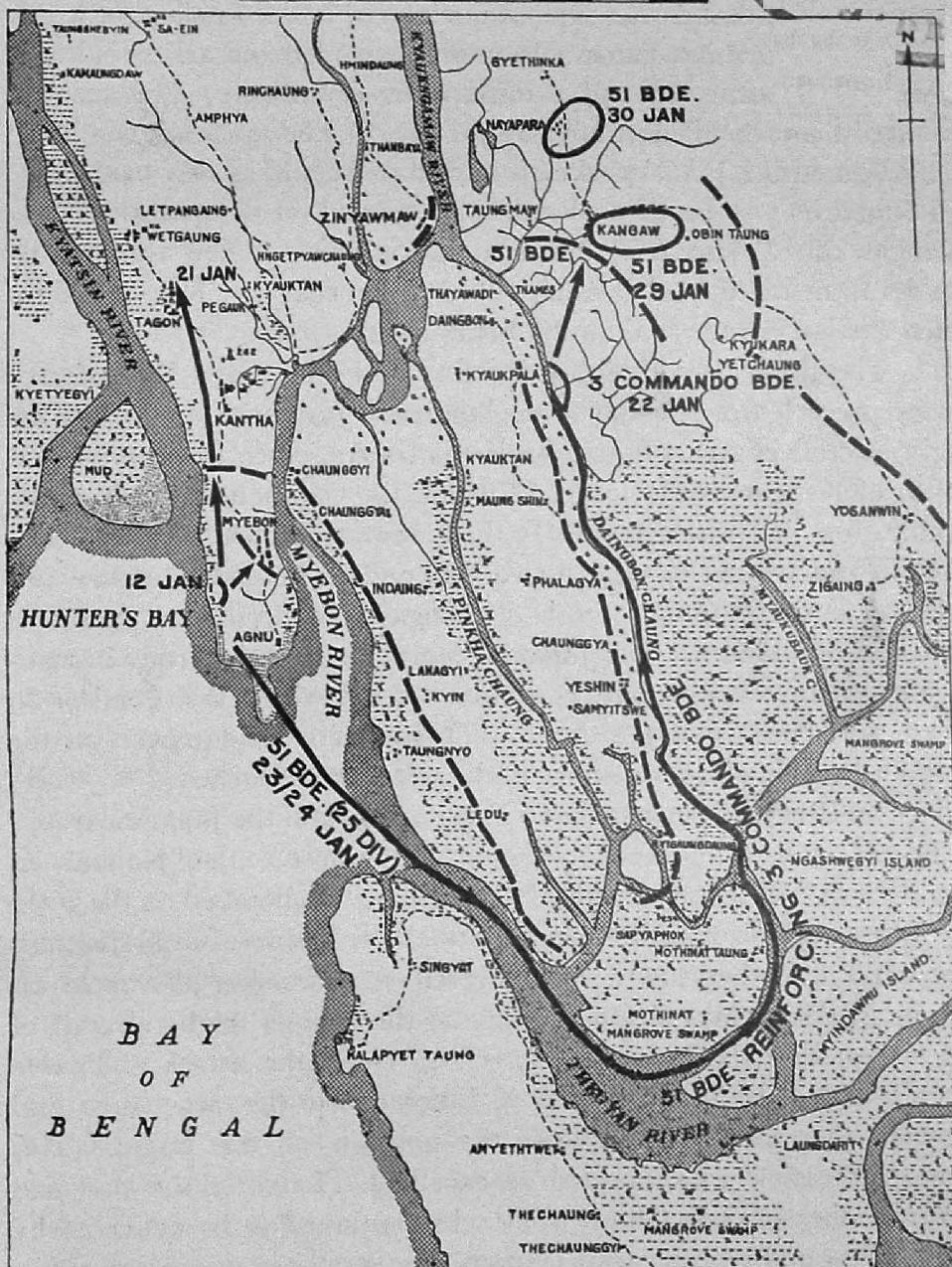
As many as five Indian squadrons lent their support in the Kangaw battle. No. 2 Squadron's aircraft kept a close watch on the Kangaw area. The road from Kangaw to Kyweguseik was frequently reconnoitred while some visits were also paid to Kethala, Yet Chaung, Min Chaung and Ta-ywa and Yaw Chaungs. Thousands of photographs of Japanese movements and dispositions were taken and delivered to the army. No. 8 Squadron also operated in Kangaw area towards the close of the month. After its operations during the Akyab landing, this squadron had been mainly engaged in offensive reconnaissances against various types of watercraft in chaungs and rivers in Myebon, Myohaung and Minbya areas. The Japanese were making use of watercraft and so these were important targets. No. 8 Squadron's pilots were able to inflict some damage on each of their missions. When the Ramree landing, discussed later, took place, this theatre engaged No. 8 Squadron's chief attention. But during the

KANGAW BATTLE

JANUARY 1945

SCALE

FURLONGS 0 4 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 MILES



HEIGHTS ARE SHOWN IN FEET.....262

LEGEND

- ALLIED TROOPS
JAPANESE TROOPS
FOOT PATH
RIVER

last days of January the Kangaw area witnessed some of the fiercest fighting in Arakan and No. 8 Squadron had to take part in this battle.

The three Hurri-bomber squadrons, Nos. 4, 9 and 10, were deeply committed in the Kangaw area. No. 9 operated in this area till 11 February. Up to 31 January the operations were carried out in full strength. On that day an explosion occurred in the fuselage of a machine and it burst into flames. Its bombs exploded and another aircraft nearby was burnt out and a third suffered damage. This accident reduced the scale of effort after 31 January. The squadron was based on Ramu until 7 January when it moved to Akyab, its new base. No. 10 Squadron was based on Ramu and carried on its operations over Kangaw till 17 February. No. 4 Squadron's aircraft flew almost daily sorties from the day of landing till 16 February. The squadron often carried out more than 20 sorties a day.

The three Hurri-bomber squadrons, Nos. 4, 9 and 10, operated at top pressure from the day of the landing. Just prior to the landing eight aircraft of No. 4 Squadron laid a smoke screen to the west and south of Kangaw under cover of which the commandos made a safe landing on the beach-head. It then went to attack Japanese positions in and around Kangaw. No. 9 Squadron bombed Kangaw and other defensive positions south of Kangaw on the day to overcome Japanese opposition. The Japanese were particularly strong in artillery and many counter battery patrols were flown by the squadron to locate and bomb gun positions. The Japanese headquarters in the area and mechanical transport parks were also attacked.

No. 10 Squadron attacked a concentration of the Japanese troops in Kangaw village and a reported gun position just south of Kangaw on the 23rd. A hill feature north of Taungmaw was bombed on the 26th. For three days prior to the ground attack on Melrose on 28 January three Hurri-bomber squadrons delivered a succession of attacks on targets in the vicinity. On the day of the assault eight aircraft of No. 4 Squadron laid a smoke screen to cover the attack. Twelve aircraft of No. 10 Squadron led 48 Liberators to the target area and dropped their bombs to indicate the position of the target. This target indication was reported as excellent. Later in the day and for a number of days following attacks continued to be delivered by the I.A.F. squadrons on various targets, viz., gun-sites, dug-in positions, observation posts and mechanical transport. On 29 and 30 January No. 8 Squadron also joined the other squadrons and flew 26 sorties on counter battery patrol over the area. From 1 February onwards delayed action bombs with 6-hour and 12-hour fuses were used in order to prevent the hill positions from being reinforced by the Japanese during the hours of darkness. On 4 February No. 9 and 10 Squadrons flew many bombing missions over Kyaingdawng, north of Kangaw, in direct support of 74 Brigade which had crossed the

Min Chaung from the west. No. 4 Squadron's target on 2 and 4 February was the bridge at Yasanwin, south-east of Kangaw ; 18,000 lbs of bombs were dropped on the bridge which was rendered unusable. The Japanese continued to offer resistance in the area north of Kangaw for some while longer and so the Indian squadrons also had to carry on operations till their resistance was broken.

The Kangaw battle was a victory for combined Indian forces—the Indian Army, the Royal Indian Navy and the Royal Indian Air Force. The contribution of the Indian Air Force can best be summed up in the words of Colonel Sen of the Baluch Regiment :—“Without the R.I.A.F. I do not know what we would have done or achieved”.

Ramree

While the Kangaw battle was being fought, other troops of XV Corps were engaged in driving the Japanese out of Ramree island. This island lies some 70 miles to the south-east of Akyab. A successful assault landing was made by the 71st Indian Infantry Brigade on 21 January at Kyaukpyu at the northern tip of the island. The northern part of the island was not being held in strength and the brigade advanced 30 miles to the south within 3 miles of Yanbank Chaung by the 24th. After failing to cross this chaung against determined resistance on the 26th and the 28th, the brigade moved north-east and drove the Japanese out of Sane on 2 February. In the meantime the 36th Indian Brigade had captured the Island of Sagu Kyun south of Ramree and from there landed on the southern tip of Ramree Island on 1 February, the 4th Brigade of 26 Division forced a crossing of the Yanbauk Chaung on 7 February. On 8 February 71 Brigade reached the hills north of Ramree town. The Japanese were trapped and tried to break the sea block and extricate their garrison. Their attempt ended in complete disaster. By 16 February all organised resistance on Ramree Island had ceased but mopping up continued for some time.

Opposition to the landing at Kyaukpyu was insignificant and air support was not required to the extent considered necessary before the landing. It has already been pointed out that the three Hurri-bomber squadrons of the IAF which had been concentrated at Indin for the task were not called upon to operate over Ramree. Only two IAF Squadrons, Nos. 2 and 8, were committed to this theatre. Reconnaissance over the battle area was a vital necessity and so while a flight of No. 2 Squadron continued operations in the Kangaw area, the other flight moved to Akyab on 20 January to provide the reconnaissance requirements of the Ramree campaign. Operations commenced on the day of the landing. Sorties were mainly for photographic and tactical reconnaissances. Almost the entire island was covered. The west coast had to be carefully

watched and visits were paid to Gonchwein, Leikkamaw, Mayin, Seiknabyin, among others places. Ramree town and its neighbourhood also received close attention and the pilots went as far as Kyauknimaw in the south-east. Waterways to the east of the island and some of the small islands to the north-east of Ramree were also visited occasionally. For collecting information reliance was more on photographs than on visual observation and a large number of prints was produced. In February the operations were on a limited scale as with the gradual fading away of opposition, the necessity for reconnaissance decreased. Reconnaissance was mainly over the area surrounding the Ramree town, and the usual information was collected.

Twelve aircraft of No. 8 Squadron also operated during the campaign from 21 to 27 January. These came to the forward airfield at Akyab on the 20th. The aircraft maintained a continuous patrol over the beaches, the harbour at Kyaukpyu and naval vessels on their way to Ramree. No Japanese aircraft was encountered and accordingly the sorties were devoid of thrill and excitement.

Further Operations Along the Arakan Coast

By early February the Japanese main forces were split up into two groups. The northern group was in the Dalet Chaung—an area covering the An pass. The southern group was in the Taungup area, covering the Taungup pass. The Allied troops were located as follows. The 28th Indian Division was engaged on the general line Kangaw-Myebon, with the 82nd W.A. Division driving the Japanese south on to this line. The 26th Indian Division with the 22nd E.A. Brigade under command was clearing up Ramree Island.

The Allied intention was to destroy the two Japanese groups. 1 and 4 Brigades of 82 W.A. Div which were en route from Hpontha to Kyweguseik began to advance on An and provide the northern arm of the pincer. To provide the southern arm 53 Brigade of 25th Division effected a landing at Ruywa nine miles south of the Dalet Chaung on 16 February. The Japanese made a determined attack on this bridge-head on 19 February but it was beaten off. 2 W.A. Bde arrived from Kangaw area on the 20th and by the 25th was 4 miles east of Ruywa. On the 25th 74 Bde of 25 Div. started to land. It pushed ahead towards Tamandu but was checked a mile east of the village on 4 March. But on 6 March a detachment of 25 Div. driving from Kangaw occupied Tamandu. 2 W.A. Bde reached the Tamandu-An road and established a road block at the Me-Chaung crossing.

In the north 82 Div. occupied Kyweguseik on 24 February and on 7 March 1 Brigade of this Division occupied Dalet village. Simultaneously 4 Brigade crossed the Dalet Chaung further south and reached 5 miles NNE of Tamandu. On 13 March, 4 Bde of 20 Div. from Ramree Island landed east of Letpan, 36 miles south of Ruywa to

cut the main road behind the Japanese forward troops. The brigade advanced rapidly down the road axis towards Taungup until held up, on 25 March, by hill positions three miles south of the Tanlwe Chaung, about five miles from Taungup. 22 E.A. Brigade had already been concentrated at Ruywa on 17 March. They then moved south in support of 4 Brigade. By the end of the month they reached Letpan. During the second week in April it was evident that the Japanese were withdrawing from the Taungup area. On 15 April Taungup was found deserted. 4 Ind. Brigade was relieved by 2 W.A. Bde on the 17th and withdrew to Ramree. 22 E.A. Brigade captured the village of Dalet on the Tanlwe Chaung nine miles north-east of Taungup on 19 April and on 28 April 4 W.A. Bde came to Taungup.

In the meantime the original plan of destroying the two Japanese groups had suffered a set back. In order to ease the maintenance situation in the XV Corps area which was necessary for increasing the air supply to the Fourteenth Army and building up of supplies at Akyab and Ramree, the 25th Division was withdrawn to Akyab by the end of March. The disposition of troops had been changed. 2 W.A. Brigade after being cut off from supplies by a Japanese road block on the Tamandu-An road west of their position moved to the Tamandu area when the road was re-opened on 26 March. 1 W.A. Brigade readjusted its position east of Letmauk, seven miles from Tamandu. In the beginning of April 1 W.A. Brigade kept up pressure in the An area to prevent the Japanese forces from withdrawing east to oppose the Fourteenth Army. 2 W.A. Brigade was sent to Taungup and 4 Brigade followed some time later.

No. 2 squadron's aircraft flew over the coastal area on the mainland from Kangaw to Taungup throughout February and March. Before the landing at Ruywa was effected on 16 February, Tamandu area within a radius of a few miles from Tamandu including Kantaunggyi, Thangyo and Shaukchon, and Dalet area including Dalet Chaung were frequently visited. The squadron aircraft flew up to Padan on the An-Minbu road and to Letpan and Lamu. After the landing at Ruywa, operations were carried out on an increased tempo. The roads from Kangaw to Lamu, from Tamandu to An and beyond, the Dalet-Letmauk, Dalet-An and Ruywa-An-Kywegu tracks and Me Chaung, east of Tamandu, were observed almost daily. A sustained effort was maintained in these areas up to about the middle of March.

Nos. 3,4,9 and 10 Squadrons also concentrated their efforts in the general area Tamandu-An-Sakanmaw-Ruywa for the greater part of February and March. Tamandu at the mouth of the Dalet Chaung was the junction of two roads—one going south towards Taungup, the other leading east to An and was therefore a vital point in the Japanese communication system. Its neighbourhood

bristled with Japanese defensive positions. An was also an important point. A road had been built connecting it with Minbu to serve as a supply route to the troops in the Arakan and also as a route for the withdrawal of troops and vehicles when the need should arise. Sakanwaw lay on the track going southwards from An.

No. 3 Squadron flew 194 sorties in February—almost all in this area. It dropped 114,250 lbs. of bombs and fired 28,220 rounds. In March the number of sorties mounted up to 299 involving 438 flying hours. The targets in February included bashas in Letmauk, Kokkomaw and Kanhtaung, troop concentrations near Shaukchon and a Japanese headquarters at Kolan, all in the Tamandu area. In the An area, Sinkhindaing village on the road to Minbu and positions north-east of An were subjected to attacks. Sakanmaw village and the neighbouring area were bombed several times. On 22 February eight direct hits were scored on the jetty at Kywegu on the Tamandu-Taungup road and the jetty was blown up. In March repeated attacks were delivered against Japanese defences, gun positions, mechanical transport etc. in the vicinity of Thinchaung on the road between Tamandu and An. On 13 March the squadron's aircraft in co-operation with No. 9 Squadron effectively bombed and strafed a Japanese wagon line south-east of Thinchaung. On the 14th, the road west of Thinchaung was bombed to cause road blocks. In the An area, bridges north-east of An, a Japanese headquarters near Pyinchaung and Japanese defensive positions were bombed. On the 27th the supply dumps at Kokwa on the An-Minbu road were attacked. In April defensive positions in Thinchaung area and those to the east and south-east of An were bombed several times. Mention may be made of the bombing of a bridge south-east of Thinchaung on 11 April as a result of which the bridge was seen to collapse. The squadron, also carried out counter-battery patrols in the An area. In most of these attacks a high measure of accuracy was achieved. The bombings of Thinchaung area on 13 and 21 March were reported by the Visual Control Post as excellent.

No. 9 Squadron attacked the An bridge, a small but a very vital target on 12, 14 and 15 February. The bridge was not very long but it was capable of taking vehicles and its destruction was necessary for preventing the withdrawal of the Japanese vehicles and heavy machinery. Due to its smallness it was a difficult target. The first attacks were unsuccessful but a direct hit was scored on the 15th and the bridge was rendered unserviceable. On the day of the Ruywa landing eight aircraft of the squadron bombed the defences on a hill feature south of Ruywa. For the rest of February and the whole of March the squadron concentrated its effort in the Tamandu-An area with occasional visits to points on the Tamandu-Taungup road. Operations were carried out without cessation. The Japanese north of Tamandu were attacked on 21 February and

a supply dump at Kolan east of Tamandu area was carried out on 2 and 4 March. A Japanese position south of Dalet was effectively bombed on the 5th. An ammunition dump south of the Thinchauing-An road was hit and blown up on the 6th and a Japanese headquarters south-east of Thinchauing bombed on the 8th. The bridge at An which had been rendered unusable on 15 February was found to be repaired and was bombed again on 7 and 8 March and put out of commission. On 9 March six aircraft flew many night sorties over the Tamandu-An road to drown the noise of advancing Allied tanks. Other targets included a waggon line between Thinchauing and An (11 March), mortar and gun position in Thinchauing area (13, 19, 20, 23, 24 March) and a mechanical transport park south-east of Thinchauing (16 and 18 March). Some further missions were flown in this area between 10 and 12 April when Japanese positions in Shaukchon, Sakawayet and those to the south-west of Thinchauing were bombed by twelve aircraft.

The squadron aircraft also bombed Yabok (17 February), Kywegu (20 February), Yattha, east of Ruywa, and Letpan (3 March). On the day of the landing at Letpan (13 March), four aircraft maintained a continuous patrol over the area and also carried out bombing missions. The accuracy of the strikes was often testified by the ground forces and the Visual Control Posts. The presentation of a Japanese flag and a sword to the squadron by 16 Baluch Regiment was an acknowledgement of the excellent support given in the Tamandu front.

No. 4 Squadron's first task in the area was laying a smoke screen in Kumhataung area on 17 February. During the next few days the neighbourhood of Ruywa was bombed. On 21 February the squadron's aircraft joined No. 9 Squadron in bombing Japanese troops north of Tamandu. On the 24th twelve aircraft bombed and strafed the An bridge which had earlier been attacked and put out of commission by No. 9 Squadron. On 3 March two Japanese aircraft bombed and strafed the Strip at Akyab, where the squadron was based, at midnight. Two of the squadron's aircraft became unserviceable and several others suffered minor damage. The squadron then moved to Kyaukpyu. From 28 February to 8 March no call for operations was received. From 9 to 20 March all the targets received were to the south-east and south-west of Thinchauing in support of 2 W.A. Brigade. On the 12th a bridge south-east of Thinchauing was bombed. It was damaged and the road at its northern end collapsed. Besides, many attacks were mounted against Japanese positions and troops in the area.

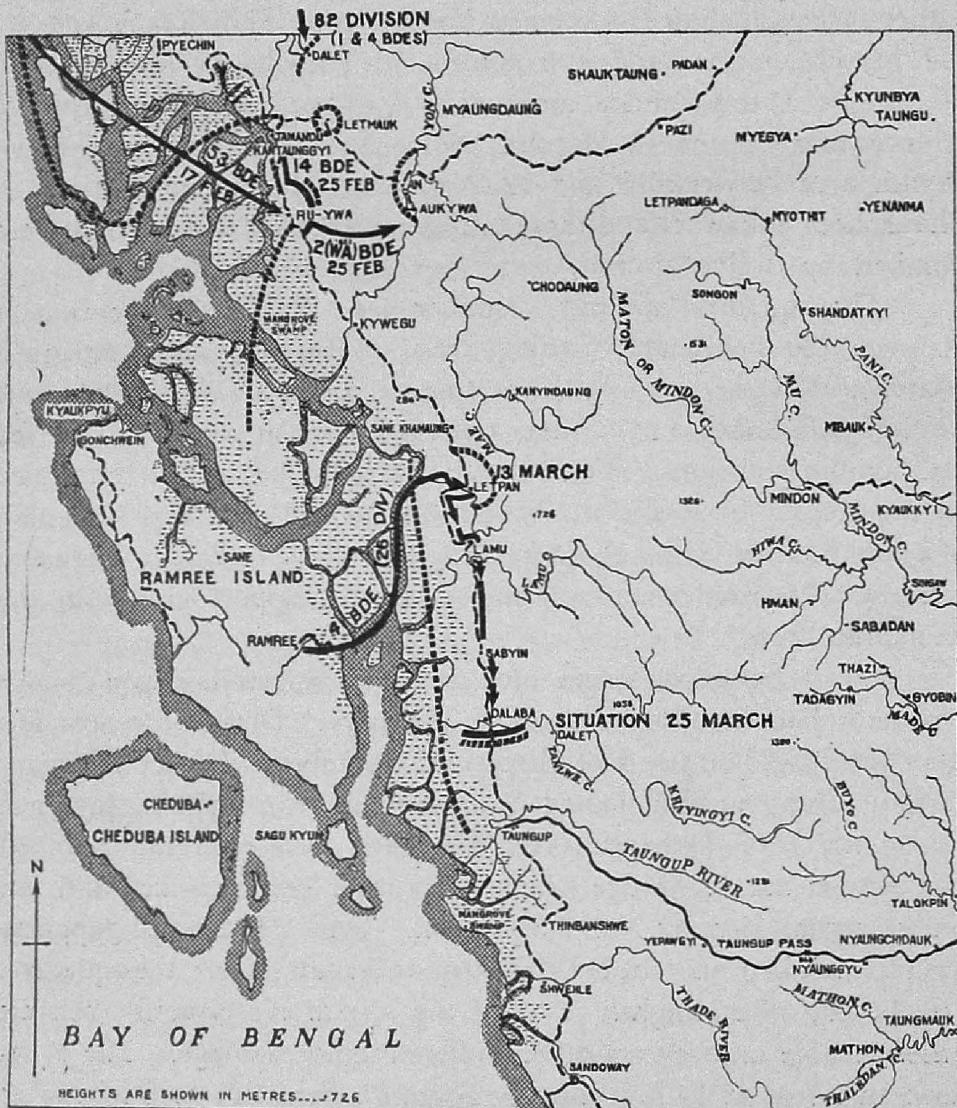
No. 10 Squadron used Akyab as a forward base on the day of the landing at Ruywa. On 19 February it moved to Bawli Bazar from Ramu and from there to Kyaukpyu on 3 March to be nearer the area of operations. On the 16th the squadron bombed and strafed

RU-YWA & LETPAN LANDINGS

FEBRUARY - MARCH 1945

SCALE OF MILES

10 5 0 10 20 30 40



LEGEND	
ALLIED TROOPS, RU-YWA LANDING	17 FEB
ALLIED TROOPS, LETPAN LANDING	13 MAR
JAPANESE TROOPS	BARRIERS
ROADS MOTORABLE ALL WEATHER	—
ROADS MOTORABLE FAIR WEATHER	—
RIVERS, CHAUNGS	—

Japanese positions at Ruywa. The jetty at Kywegu was bombed and strafed on 21 February but without any satisfactory results. The Kantaunggyi area and the ferry at Tamandu were attacked on the 23rd and oil drums on the bank of the Dalet Chaung on the 24th. Counter-battery patrol was carried out on 5, 6, and 7 March during which a hill feature south of Dalet, Tamandu, Shaukchon area, and a position north-east of An were successfully bombed. Some of the positions bombed were at a distance of less than 100 yards from the Allied troops. Accordingly great accuracy had to be maintained in these attacks. The Thinchauung area received almost daily visits from 9 to 18 March, the targets including a gun position east of Thinchauung (9th), a fuel dump south-east of Thinchauung (10, 12, 14, 15, 16 March) Sakanmaw village (11th), rivercraft on the An Chaung (11th). Sakanmaw was on fire following the attack and many rivercraft were destroyed on the An Chaung.

On 13 March, the day of the Letpan landing, three sections of four aircraft each maintained a patrol over the area west of Letpan and bombed a Japanese headquarters by the side of the Ma-E Chaung.

The Taungup area began to figure in the list of targets for the Indian squadrons with the progress of 4 Brigade of 26 Division in that direction from Letpan. Information about the Japanese reaction was immediately necessary and No. 2 Squadron was the first Indian squadron to be engaged over the area. Tanlwe Chaung, north-east of Taungup, was frequently watched for signs of river traffic. From 17 March onwards the neighbourhood of Taungup was visited almost daily. On the 23rd the squadron flew over Yapawggi, a key point on the Taungup-Prome road and hereafter this area also figured in the daily programme. Sorties over the Taungup-Prome road were meant to discover the movement of traffic on it, the conditions of the road after the bombing and alternative tracks that might be used. In April, before the fall of Taungup on the 16th, the squadron's sorties were concentrated in the Taungup area where the Japanese were offering strong resistance. From the fall of Taungup till 17 May, on which day the squadron ceased operations, reconnaissances were flown over the Taungup-Prome, and Taungup-Sandoway roads.

Between 20 and 25 March Nos. 10, 4, 3 and 9 squadrons became fully committed to this front. All these squadrons were almost exclusively engaged in this area till they were withdrawn on 17, 19, 13, 14 April respectively. No. 10 paid its first visit on 29 March when its aircraft, escorted by six Spitfires of No. 273 Squadron R.A.F. bombed an ammunition dump east of Taungup near milestone 100. Hmanni on Yankaw Chaung, south-east of Taungup, was set on fire on 21 March. Japanese wagon lines were attacked on the 25th and watercraft on the Taungup river destroyed or damaged on 25, 26 and 27 March.

The Allied troops had, as mentioned before, been halted about

five miles north of Taungup on 25 March. The Japanese defensive positions were sited in thick jungles which provided very good cover. In order to deprive the Japanese of this advantage No. 10 Squadron started using incendiary bombs during the last week of March. The jungle was green but summer heat had rendered it liable to ignition and No. 10 Squadron's bombs were able to cause many fires which cleared wide stretches of forest and uncovered Japanese positions.

Incendiary bombs were dropped with satisfactory results on a hill feature north-west of Taungup on 27 March, on the north side of the village itself on the 28th, and on another hill feature east of the village near milestone 108 on the 29th. The Japanese defensive positions (Pt. 678 and Hill 370), both north of Taungup, were bombed on 2 and 3 April respectively. Counter-battery patrols over the area just east of the village were carried out on 9 and 10 April. Incendiary bombs were again used in attacks on a Japanese headquarters east of Hmanni on 7, 10 and 11 April. The attack on the last day was followed by a blaze. On 3 and 15 April the squadron aircraft visited Sandoway area and attacked bashas, gun positions and rivercraft. Some sorties were also flown over the Prome area in April. On the 10th and 11th boats on the Irrawaddy near Prome were strafed and some damaged and on the 12th offensive reconnaissances over the Prome-Thayetmyo road were carried out.

No. 4 Squadron's main occupation was the blocking of the Taungup-Prome road. But the squadron also catered to the needs of the ground forces in Taungup area. Some sorties were flown on 21 and 22 March against Japanese positions east of Taungup. Again from 11 to 14 April many missions were flown in aid of the ground troops. A feature on Tanlwe Chaung north-east of Taungup was the target on the 12th and gun positions east of Taungup were attacked on the 14th.

No. 3 Squadron's first mission in Taungup area was on 25 March against the Japanese positions north of the village. On the 29th more attacks were delivered on Japanese dug-in positions obstructing the Allied advance near Yabye about six miles north of Taungup. The strike was very effective and enabled 2/13 Frontier Force Rifles to occupy a strategic hill feature. Incendiary bombs were dropped on the 31st on positions north-east of the village. On 3 April it took part in an airstrike on a strong point about four miles north of Taungup. The strike was very effective and the infantry occupied the position unopposed immediately afterwards. The squadron was rewarded with a message of appreciation from the 4th Indian Brigade for its part in the strike.

Like No. 3 Squadron, No. 9 Squadron also started operations in Taungup area on 25 March. On that day a defensive position north-east of Taungup was bombed by ten aircraft. Offensive reconnaissances were carried out over the Taungup-Prome road on

the 27th and 28th and gun positions located round Taungup were bombed on 30 March and 3, 4, and 9 April.

The road running from Taungup to Prome was a very important link between the Japanese in the central and the Arakan fronts. It was an escape route for the Japanese southern group in Arakan. It was essential that this road should be put out of commission and Japanese withdrawal, especially of their vehicles and weapons, along this road should be prevented. This important task was entrusted to three squadrons : No. 373 RAF Spitfire Squadron, and No. 4 and No. 10 Squadrons. Definite portions of this 110-mile long road were allotted to them—No. 373 the forty miles nearest Prome, No. 4 the middle forty and No. 10 the rest of the road at the Tangup end. The road at the Taungup end was made entirely of loose sand and gravel. This circumstance made the task of blocking the road difficult. For one thing, bombs could not have the maximum blast effect and so did little damage to the road. Moreover, damage, when caused, could be repaired and the road made serviceable easily and quickly. The job was therefore an engrossing one demanding continuous application.

No. 10 Squadron's first road-busting mission was flown on 22 March when twelve aircraft scored direct hits on the road between milestone 76 and 80 without any appreciable effect. On 24 and 27 March the road between milestone 44 and 48 to the east of the Taungup pass was bombed. On the 30th the road at milestone 70, west of Yapawgyi, received 24 bombs. The bombing was accurate but again did not create any road block. On the 31st thirty-six sorties were flown. The earlier strikes were not very effective but later in the day a landslide was caused. In April various points on the road viz., at milestone 94, 92, 84, 97 and 70 were bombed but the pilots reported the road still serviceable after the attacks.

Most of No. 4 Squadron's bombs were on the road near milestone 70 in Yapawgyi area. The attacks on 23, 24 and 25 March caused landslides and blocked the road. The subsequent attacks were designed to cause more landslides and enlarge the existing ones. On 2, 6, 10 and 17 April, pilots described the road as impassable but on the 5th, 6th, 7th, 9th, 13th, 15th and 16th the road was found repaired and at least partially serviceable. Tracks or footpaths clearly visible on road blocks indicated that the road was being used. To prevent the repair work from being undertaken immediately after the bombing, the squadron began using delayed action bombs with six and twelve hours' fuses.

No. 3 Squadron also was occasionally employed on road-blocking missions. Yapawgyi was bombed on 1 April and subsequently points on the road east and west of the Taungup pass were attacked with delayed action bombs. On 4 April, the road near Nyaunggyo was bombed and the road was noticed completely blocked as a result.

CHAPTER XV

THE LAST STAGE

The possession of Rangoon was an event of great significance, both symbolical and practical. The fate of the Japanese in Burma was sealed but some stiff fighting had yet to be done before the Japanese were reconciled to the inevitable and accepted defeat. The 26th Indian Division, after the occupation of Rangoon on 3 May, had linked with the 17th Indian Division at Hlegu, 28 miles north of Rangoon on 5 May and with the 20th Indian Division on the Prome Road, 60 miles north of Rangoon, on 15 May. They thus controlled the two arterial roads northwards via Toungoo and Prome but large areas of central Burma were no-man's land. In the lightning drive south to Rangoon down the Toungoo and Prome roads large sections of the Japanese had been cut off from their main forces which had withdrawn to the Sittaung valley—some west of the Prome road and others between the two roads. To destroy these forces was one of the primary tasks of IV and XXXIII Corps. Throughout June, mopping up and patrolling were carried out on the Prome-Rangoon axis and in the Pegu Yoma. In the southern sector of the front, particularly in the area east of Letpan and Tharrawaddy, the Japanese remained aggressive in the first half of June ; but the 20th Indian Division put a stop to this by the end of the month. In the area of the Sittaung Old Channel the Japanese *Thirty-third Army* staged a counter attack. They crossed to the west bank of the Sittaung and the forward troops of the 7th Indian Division were forced to abandon Nyaungkashe, west of Mokpalin, and Myitkyo further north. But by the middle of July the force of the offensive spent itself and the "Battle of the Sittaung Bend" was over.

On 20 July began the expected breakout of the Japanese *Twenty-eighth Army* across the Rangoon-Toungoo road. The troops numbered nearly 20,000 men and they attempted to cross at various points on a front of 150 miles, between Toungoo in the north and Nyaunglebin in the south. The "Battle of the Break-out" was a disaster for the Japanese. Though a part of this army succeeded in reaching the east bank of the Sittaung, it lost 6,271 in killed between 20 July and 4 August and nearly a thousand were taken prisoners.

The air force available during the monsoon was insufficient for operations on a big scale. On 1 June, all United States air force units, including the 10th U.S.A.A.F. and the American components of the Eastern Air Command, were withdrawn from S.E.A.C. Eastern Air Command Headquarters was then disbanded and all

R.A.F. formations and units of this Command were taken over by R.A.F. Burma Headquarters under Air Marshal Sir Alexander Coryton who was to control all air operations in Burma. Besides the transfer of all the U.S. air units, the air forces in the theatre suffered further reduction as No. 224 Group moved back to India and many squadrons were withdrawn for rest. Only 221 Group was available for close support to the land forces. It consisted of four squadrons of Thunderbolts (p-47), four squadrons of Spitfires, two squadrons of Mosquitos, one squadron of Hurricanes for tactical reconnaissance and one flight of light inter-communication aircraft (L-50). The bomber strength was much reduced and there were only eight transport squadrons for air supply. The small Japanese Air Force was practically inactive. In fact, Air Chief Marshal Park was able in June to withdraw all fighters from defensive and escort duties.

221 Group struck at the Japanese in the Pegu Yoma and notified the ground forces of the escape routes that they were using. The pilots strafed troop concentrations, paying special attention to vehicles. 221 Group also gave close support to the Burma National Army. Its photographic reconnaissance work was much hampered by monsoon conditions. Tactical reconnaissance was useful mainly in producing much topographical information.

The only I.A.F. squadron in operation during this period was No. 8. It arrived with its Spitfires (Mk VIII) at Mingaladon airfield outside Rangoon on 26 July 1945 and took over from 607 Squadron R.A.F. on the 31st. The Spitfires had, since the squadron's withdrawal from the Arakan front on 24 February, been fitted with bomb racks, and it was as a fighter-bomber squadron that they came to the front for the third time. The squadron started operations on 1 August. As was to be expected the main effort of the squadron was bombing and strafing. The battle of the break-out was nearing its end. A proportion of the Japanese troops trapped west of the Rangoon-Toungoo road had succeeded in escaping east of the Sittaung and No. 8 Squadron's task was to make their flight as costly as possible. In pursuance of this, the aircraft concentrated their attention on Shwegen and Mokpalin areas. Places visited included Donzayit on the east bank of the Sittaung south of Shwegen, Menzaungwa, Thukoba and Tikeda—all north-east of Shwegen, Timugyaung north-east of Donzayit, Mokpalin, Mokkamaw north of Mokpalin, Tawgyi west of Mokpalin, Winpyan west of Bilin and Payagyi north of Pegu. The targets were bashas, supply and ammunition dumps and concentrations of troops. Army reports showed that as a result of a successful strike on the Donzayit area on 3 August many Japanese soldiers were killed and a raft concentration broken up. The same source congratulated the squadron on the accuracy of the bombing of Thukoba on the 4th. The accuracy of

the squadron's attacks was confirmed by the Japanese sources also. A Japanese prisoner of war testified that the bombing of the west bank of the Shwegenyin Chaung where the squadron had operated for five days consecutively commencing from 3 August resulted in half the Japanese forces in the area being killed. On 11 August eight aircraft fitted with long-range tanks went as far as Paingkyon, south-east of Hlaingbwe, to bomb the Japanese in the inspection bungalow there. Besides bombing and strafing, the pilots also dropped supplies to the men of 136 Force working behind the Japanese lines. This force was composed of Burmese troops whose job was to obtain intelligence about the movement of the Japanese and by acts of sabotage disrupt the Japanese lines of communication.

On 6 and 9 August atomic bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki respectively. On the 14th Japan accepted unconditional surrender and on the day following orders for the suspension of operations were issued by the Supreme Commander. But clashes with the Japanese continued till the end of the month in Mawchi, Shwegenyin and Waw areas. By the end of August the armistice in Burma was almost complete.

A Japanese delegation headed by Lieut-General Numata came to Rangoon on 26 August and signed the preliminary agreement on the night of the 27th. On 12 September, the Supreme Commander accepted the surrender of the Japanese expeditionary forces of the Southern Region in a formal ceremony at Singapore. From 14 August for four days no operations were carried out by No. 8 Squadron on account of the surrender talks. When the Japanese delegation headed by Lt.-General Numata came to Rangoon to sign the instrument of surrender, the two aircraft in which they travelled were escorted by, among others, two Spitfires of No. 8 Squadron from Elephant Point to Mingaladon.

The signature of the surrender documents did not, however, mean an end of No. 8 Squadron's operations. The Japanese had surrendered but as information to that effect did not immediately reach the scattered units of the Japanese army, No. 8 Squadron flew many sorties to drop leaflets asking the Japanese troops to cease fire in view of the acceptance of the surrender terms by the Japanese Headquarters, Tokyo. While leaflet dropping was the main job, they also observed Japanese movements and concentrations of boats and mechanical transport in Mokpalin-Bilin-Thaton-Kawkareik-Amherst area, and dropped money on 136 Force in different areas for the final pay-up. In the second half of October they flew several sorties over Bassein area to scare the pro-Japanese villagers who were creating disturbances in that area. The fly-past in the area continued till 14 November by when the expected results were considered to have been achieved. Towards the middle of January 1946, the squadron moved back to India.

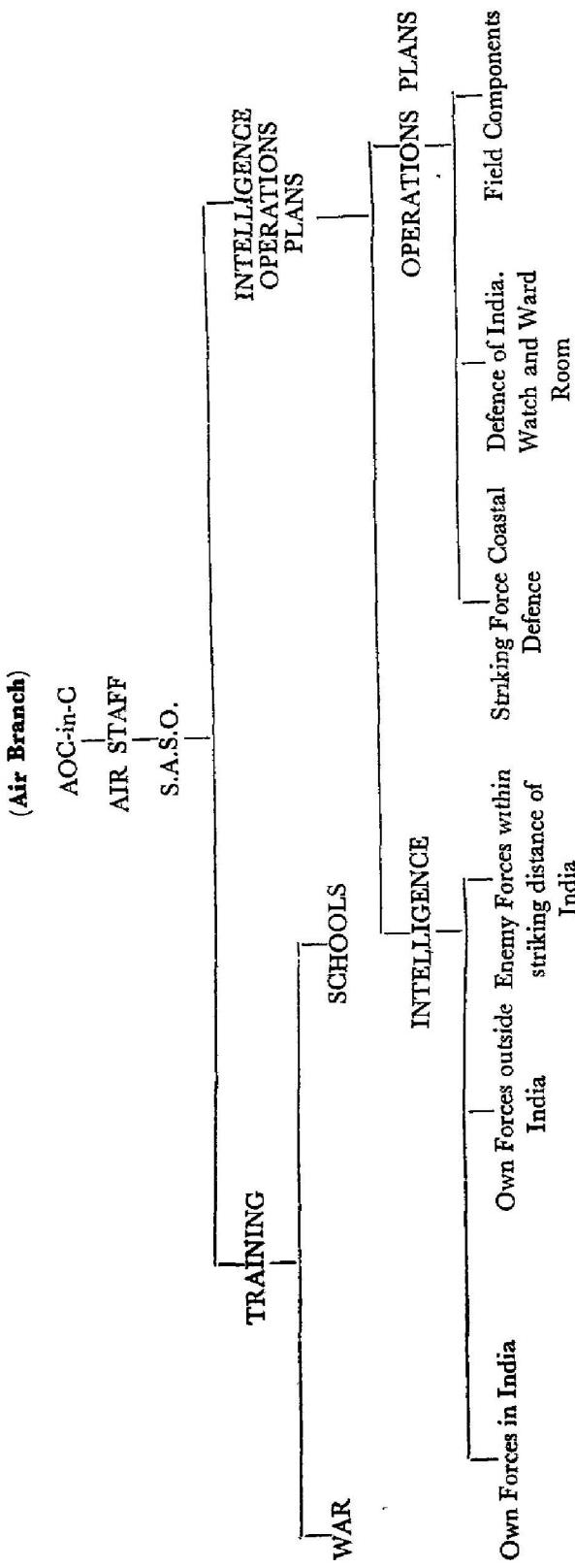
After the surrender of Japan there was naturally no demand for intensive effort. But during the first thirteen days of August, the squadron put up a good rate of effort, being engaged in two and sometimes three missions a day. The month's total came to 251 sorties, most of them before the Japanese surrender, and a bomb load of 60,500 lbs. was dropped. Thus ended the work of the Indian Air Force in the Second World War, and judging from the results of it, it was no mean achievement.

The I.A.F. was built up solely as a tactical air force. It was trained and equipped only for reconnaissance and army co-operation work. The consequence was that the more spectacular work of the air force which lends glamour to the achievements of the air crew was outside the scope of the Indian Air Force. "So far as the material is concerned, the I.A.F. had for long to be satisfied with the scrapings of the R.A.F." This affected the morale of the pilots. Even later, when more modern aircraft were pouring into India and I.A.F. squadrons were equipped with Hurricanes and Vengeance dive-bombers, the I.A.F. never fully got rid of this feeling of inferiority in equipment.

In spite of these adverse circumstances, in the war against the Axis powers, the Indian Air Force played a part in keeping with the great tradition of Indian arms. The I.A.F. pilots flew over 16,000 sorties in Burma alone involving more than 24,000 operational flying hours. All the nine squadrons acquitted themselves well, the contribution of No. 1 Squadron being the most outstanding. Out of 22 D.F.C's awarded to the I.A.F., the share of this squadron alone was nine. A measure of the reputation earned by the Indian Air Force which, it may be recalled, consisted of only one incomplete squadron at the outbreak of war, is the recognition of the value of its work. The grant of the designation "Royal" in March 1945, by His Majesty the King was a recognition of the signal contribution made by the I.A.F. towards the victory over Japan. One D.S.O., 22 D.F.Cs, a bar to D.F.C., 2 A.F.Cs, 2 O.B.Es, 7 M.B.Es, 45 Mentions in Despatches, 4 B.E.M.s., one card for good service and one commendation for gallantry were earned by the members of the Indian Air Force—all, except a very few, during the war, in Burma. Time and again the pilots of the I.A.F. were recipients of praise from the ground forces and from Group and Command Headquarters for their gallantry and useful work. But this achievement was not without price. During the war the I.A.F. lost more than 50 pilots in operations in Burma alone. Some more lost their lives in the course of coast defence operations, and in the war in Europe. The number of pilots killed in the course of training and non-operational flights was also not negligible.

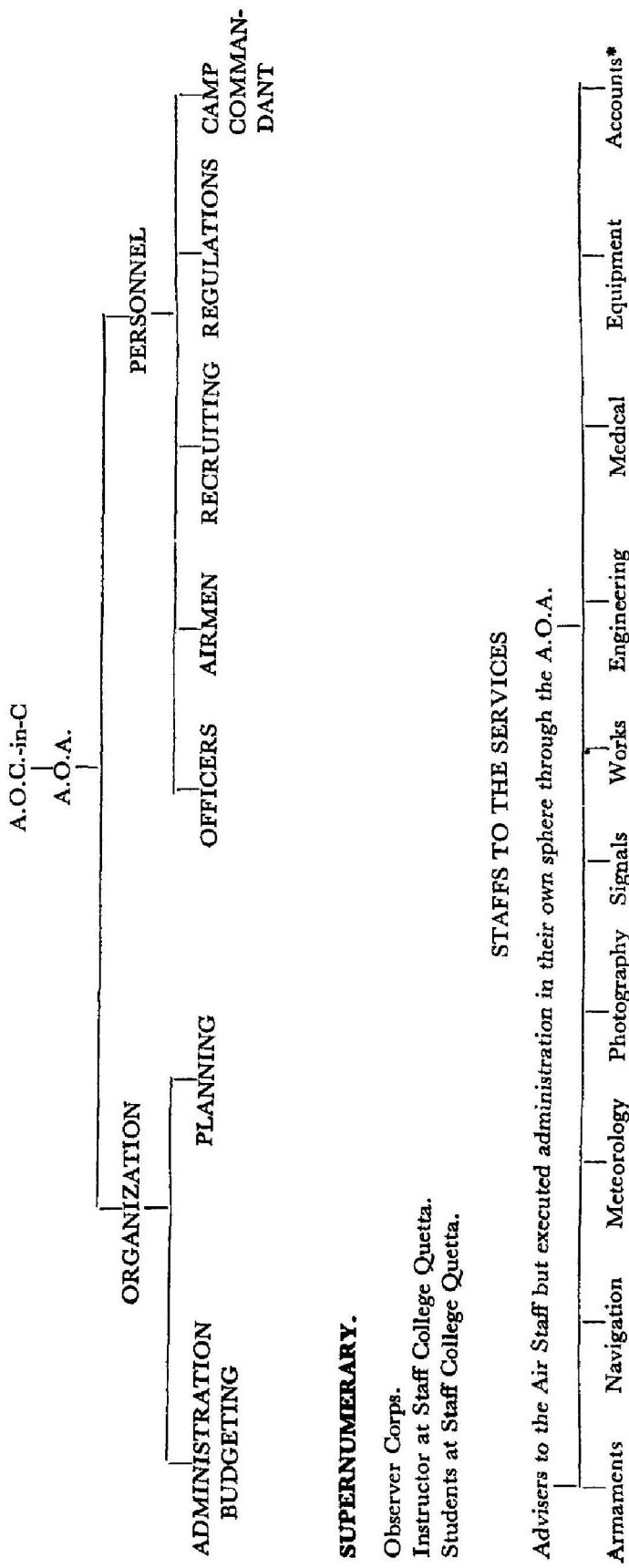
Appendix "A"

ORGANIZATION OF AIR HEADQUARTERS, INDIA, NOVEMBER 1943



(Operations and Intelligence Officers maintained each watch for 24 hours)
 In addition to the above, Staffs to the Services acted as advisers to the Air Staff but executed administration in their own sphere through the Air Officer i/c Administration.

(Administrative Branch)



SUPERNUMERARY.

Observer Corps.
Instructor at Staff College Quetta.
Students at Staff College Quetta.

STAFFS TO THE SERVICES

Advisers to the Air Staff but executed administration in their own sphere through the A.O.A.

Armaments	Navigation	Meteorology	Photography	Signals	Works	Engineering	Medical	Equipment	Accounts*
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(*Began to operate in 1943 as part of the Inter Services Public Relations Directorate at G.H.Q.(I))

Appendix "B"

**ESTABLISHMENT AND ORGANIZATION OF AIR HEADQUARTERS,
INDIA, IN AUGUST 1945**

(i) **Strength Summary**

<i>Officers</i>			<i>Other Ranks</i>			<i>Ministerial establishment</i>		
RIAF	RAF	WAC(I)	RIAF	RAF	Gazetted Officers	Indian clerks	-	Inferior Personnel
27	68	2	53	90	12	160*		145

(ii) **Organization**

		Policy Staff	
		<i>Air Branch</i>	<i>Administrative Branch</i>
S.A.S.O.	Air Commodore J/Cmd WAC(I)	A.O A.	Air Commodore J/Comd. WAC(I)
Plans	Air Commodore 1 Wing Comd.	Senior Officer Personnel Staff	Group Captain
Intelligence	1 Wing Commander and 2 Officers	Demobilization Planning Staff	Group Captain
Intelligence (Security)	1 S/Ldr and 4 Officers	Combined Air Demobilization Planning Sec.	2 Wing Comds.
Operations	1 Wing Comd. and 1 Officer	Manning	1 Wing Comd. and 5 Officers
Training	2 Wing Comds. 7 Officers 1 Officer Supervisor	Personnel Services	1 Wing Comd. 10 Officers 1 Officer Supervisor
Pre-entry training	1 Wing Comd. and 3 Officers	Pay, Pensions & Regulations	1 Admin Officer (1st.grade) and 3 Officer Supervisors
Statistics	1 F/Lt; 1 F/O; 1 Officer Supervisor	Administrative Plans Organisation Central Section Registry	1 Wing Comd. 7 Officers 1 Officer Supervisor 1 Officer Supervisor Warrant Officer

(*Includes 88 clerks from Indian Army Corps of Clerks)

STAFF OF SERVICES

<i>Air Branch</i>		<i>Administrative Branch</i>	
Navigation	F/Lt.	Accounts	Wing Comd. and 4 Officers
Photography	F/Lt.	Armaments	Wing Comd. and F/Lt.
Physical Fitness	F/Lt.	Education	Wing Comd. and 3 Officers
Regiment	S/Ldr.	Engineering	Wing Comd. 8 Officers and 2 Officer Supervisors
Signals	Wing Comd and 2 Officers	Equipment	Wing Comd. 4 Officers and 2 Officer Supervi- sors
	Legal		Squadron Leader
	Medical		Wing Comd. and Squadron Leader
	Welfare		Wing Comd. and 3 Officers
M.T. Section			

Appendix "C"

TRAINING SCHOOLS—FUNCTIONS AND ORGANIZATIONS

UNIT OR SCHOOL	LOCATION & GROUP	FUNCTION OR COURSE	LENGTH OF COURSE	PEAK POPULATION
<i>Technical Training.</i> No. 1 School of Technical Training	Ambala No. 223	<i>Ab Initio Trade Training I.A.F.</i> Armourers Photographers Instruments Reps II M.T. Mechs. Meteorologist Asst.	21 weeks 20 weeks 20 weeks 14 weeks 16 weeks	492 100 120 200 20
		<i>Conversion Trg. I.A.F.</i> Armourer to Fitter Armourer Inst. Rep. II to Inst. Rep. I M.T. Mech. to Fitter M.T.	27 weeks 24 weeks 20 weeks	79 78 50
No. 2 School of Technical Training	Secunderabad No. 227	<i>Ab Initio Trade Training I.A.F.</i> F.M.A. F.M.E. Carpenters II	16 weeks 16 weeks 20 weeks	650 650 144
		Fabric Workers Sheet Metal Workers	12 weeks 24 weeks	60 10
		<i>Conversion Training IAF</i> FMA to Fitter IIA F.M.E. to Fitter IIE	20 weeks 20 weeks	65 65

No. 7 School of Air Force Technical Training

	<i>Ab Initio Trade Training Anglo Indians.</i>	
No. 223		
F.M.A.	18 weeks	130
F.M.E.	18 weeks	130
Wireless Operators	14 weeks	104
M.T. Mechanics	12 weeks	90

No. 9 School of Air Force Technical Training
(also catered for a few R.A.F. personnel)

	<i>Ab Initio Trade Training I.A.F.</i>	
No. 227		
F.M.E.	12 weeks	546
F.M.A.	12 weeks	

No. 10 School of Air Force Technical Training
(also catered for a few R.A.F. personnel)

	<i>No. 1 Training Wing.</i>	
No. 227		
Electricians Instructors	4 weeks	
Electricians II	22 weeks	
Electricians I	20 weeks	
Charging Board Operators	6 weeks	
Instrument Repairers II	20 weeks	
Instrument Repairers I	24 weeks	

	<i>No. 2 Training Wing</i>	
Signal Instructors	4 weeks	I.A.F.
Wireless Operators	20 weeks	Officers
Wireless Operator Mechanics	24 weeks	26
Teletypewriter Operators	12 weeks	
R/T Operators	10 weeks	R.A.F.
D/F Operators	6 weeks	Airmen
Signals Officers	6 months	10
Radar Officers (Course in Signals)	2 weeks	I.A.F.
		Airmen
		1056.

No. 11 School of Air Force Technical Training

	<i>Ab Initio Trade Training I.A.F.</i>	
No. 225		
Motor Boat Crew (Group III) and Fitter Marine (Group I)	8 weeks	96

UNIT OR SCHOOL	LOCATION & GROUP	FUNCTION OR COURSE	LENGTH OF COURSE	PEAK POPULATION
No. 12 School of Air Force Technical Training	Baroda No. 227	<i>Trade Training R.A.F. and I.A.F.</i> Safety Equipment Worker Safety Equipment Assistant Safety Equipment Safety Equipment Instructors Course	5 weeks 7 weeks 3 weeks 4 weeks	96 I.O.R. 20 I.O.R. 5 B.O. & I.O. 3 IOR
		<i>Conversion Training R.A.F. & I.A.F.</i> Conversion Course Balloon Operator Conversion Course SEA to SEW	4 weeks 11 weeks	3 B.O.R. & 3 IOR 50 IOR. 24 IOR.
Driver Mechanical Transport School	Secunderabad No. 227	<i>Trade Training LAF.</i> ACH/DMT. ACH/Motor Cyclist M.T. Refresher Course I.A.F. Refueler Maintenance Course.	8 weeks 5 weeks 6 weeks 2 weeks	580 Airmen Drivers & 20 Motor Cyclists 10
No. 51 Radio School	Bangalore No. 225	<i>Training of I.A.F. Personnel.</i> Signal (Radar) (G) Officers Operations Room (G) (Fitter) Officers Radar Mechs, (G) Radar Ops (G) Clerks S.D. Signal (Radar) (G) Officers	3½ months 1½ months 3½ months 7 weeks 6 weeks 2 weeks (Refresher)	60 20 50 200 40 5 (G) 2 weeks (G & A) 3 weeks (Refresher) (A) 1 week (G) 3 weeks (Refresher) (A)

No. 1 Signals School	Andheri No. 227	<i>Trade Training I.A.F.</i> Wireless Operators (Ground)	16 weeks	992
No. 2 Officers & Cadets Training School	Parsi Orphanage, Poona No. 227	<i>Training for I.A.F. Officers and Cadets</i> Junior Admin. School (Officers) Cadets Disc. School Cadets Initial Trg. Wing	4 weeks 8 weeks 18 weeks	20 I.A.F. 100 I.A.F. 315 I.A.F.
No. 1 Recruits Training Centre	Walton Lahore No. 223.	<i>No. 1 Recruits Reception Centres</i> Reception, Kitting, Medical Examination and Interview by Training Progress Board up to 10 days	10 days	280
		No. 1 Recruits Reception Centre Course No. 1 Elementary Training Wing Disc. Course	3 weeks 13 weeks 3 weeks	500 320 500
		No. 1 Recruits Educational Wing No. 1 Advance Training Wing		
No. 2 Recruits Training Centre	Jalahali No. 225	No. 2 Recruits Reception Centre Course No. 2 Elementary Training Wing Disc. Course	10 days 3 weeks 13 weeks 3 weeks	280 500 320 500
Followers Reception Centre	Lahore No. 223	Kitting and Despatch to Units Elementary Discipline Training	1 week	Approx. 70 direct entries (except cooks).

UNIT OR SCHOOL	LOCATION & GROUP	FUNCTION OR COURSE	LENGTH OF COURSE	PEAK POPULATION
<i>Training of Indian Officers, B.O.Rs and I.O.Rs.</i>				
<i>in Non-Technical Trades:</i> —				
Non-Technical Training Centre (Also Catered for a few R.A.F. Personnel)	Secunderabad No. 227	Admnl. & Discip. (Junior N.C.Os) Anti Gas & Fire Clerks (E.A.) Clerks (G.D.) Clerks (P.A.) Clerks (Provisioning) Code & Cypher Equipment Fire Fighting Gas I.A.F. Police Physical Training Storekeepers Telephonist Admnl. & Discip. (Senior N.C.Os)	6 weeks 4 weeks 8 weeks 10 weeks 6 weeks 6 weeks 8 weeks 8 weeks 8 weeks 8 weeks 3 weeks 6 weeks 8 weeks 12 weeks 8 weeks 6 weeks 6 weeks	40 15 50 500 39 80 130 410 40 120 70 90 26 90 30
B.M.H. Chakrata	Chakrata No. 226	Nursing Orderlies Course	6 months	138
Cookery School	Secunderabad No. 227	Cooks, B.T. Cooks, I.T.	8 weeks 4 weeks	500
No. 1 Air Gunners School Cadets Initial Training Wing	Bairagarh Bhopal. No. 227. Poona No. 227.	I.A.F. W.Op/A Gs. Indian Air Force Aircrew Initial Training	12 weeks 4 months	315

No. 1 Elementary Flying Training School	Begumpet No. 227	Indian Air Force Elementary Flying Training	12 weeks	142
No. 2 Elementary Flying Training School	Jodhpur No. 226	As for No. 1 E.F.T.S.	12 weeks	142
Low Attack Instructors School	Ranchi No. 231	<i>Wastage Replacements</i> Hurricane	3 weeks	
No. 151 Operational Training Unit	151 Risalpur No. 152 Peshawar 223	(151) Hurricane C.T.U. Training (152) Vengeance O.T.U. Training (151) Fighter Recce Specialised Training	12 weeks 10 weeks 4 weeks	70
No. 1 Service Flying Training School	Ambala No. 223	Service Flying Training	18 weeks	180

Appendix "D"

LIST OF R.I.A.F. PERSONNEL SHOWING THE PUNISHMENTS (SHORT & LONG) AWARDED

R.I.A.F. OFFICERS			R.I.A.F. AIRMEN		
Year	Death Sentence	Transportation for life	Long Imprisonment	Short Imprisonment	Death Sentence
1942-43	..	—	—	2	—
1943-44	..	—	—	2	—
1944-45	..	—	—	—	—
				5	42
				7	22
					56

Appendix "E"
COURTS MARTIAL UNDER AIR FORCE ACT

	Year Ending	G.C.M.	D.C.M.	F.G.C.M.
A.	30 September 1939	..	1	4
	30 September 1940	..	1	6
	30 September 1941	..	2	—
	30 September 1942	..	3	28
B.	30 September 1943	..	28	110
	30 September 1944	..	32	190
	30 September 1945	..	41	168
	TOTAL OF B.	..	107	504
C.	Average of B.	..	18	5.7

COURTS MARTIAL UNDER INDIAN AIR FORCE ACT

	Year Ending	G C M.	D.C.M.
A.	30 September 1939	..	—
	30 September 1940	..	—
	30 September 1941	..	—
	30 September 1942	..	—
B.	30 September 1943	..	7
	30 September 1944	..	11
	30 September 1945	..	15
	TOTAL OF B.	..	33
C.	Average of B.	..	5.5

Appendix "F"

LIST OF I.A.F. PERSONNEL WHO WON DECORATIONS DURING THE WAR

Serial No.	Rank at time of award	Name	Date of Award	Decoration
1555	Wg. Cdr.	K.K. Majumdar	Nov., 1942	D.F.C.
1554	Wg. Cdr.	A.M. Engineer	Dec., 1942	D.F.C.
2810	Flt. Lt.	S. Sukthankar	Sep., 1943	D.F.C.
1577	Sqn. Ldr.	Arjun Singh	Jun., 1944	D.F.C.
1637	Fg. Off.	D.G. Bhore	Aug., 1944	D.F.C.
1646	Fg. Off.	J.C. Varma	Aug., 1944	D.F.C.
1555	Wg. Cdr.	K.K. Majumdar	Jan., 1945	Bar to D.F.C.
1707	Fg. Off.	A.R. Pandit	Jan., 1945	D.F.C.
1726	Fg. Off.	B. Ramachandra Rao	Jan., 1945	D.F.C.
2335	Fg. Off.	P.S. Gupta	Apr., 1945	D.F.C.
2004	Fg. Off.	K.N. Kak	Apr., 1945	D.F.C.
2364	Fg. Off.	M.N. Balsara	Apr., 1945	D.F.C.
1537	Sqn. Ldr.	R. Rajaram	Apr., 1945	D.F.C.
1604	Flt. Lt.	M.S. Puji	Apr., 1945	D.F.C.
1716	Fg. Off.	B.N. Surrendra	Jul., 1945	D.F.C.
1620	Flt. Lt.	H.N. Chatterjee	Aug., 1945	D.F.C.
1841	Fg. Off.	N.K. Shitole	Aug. 1945	D.F.C.
1614	Flt. Lt.	M.M. Engineer	Oct., 1945	D.F.C.
2120	Fg. Off.	R.M. Engineer	Oct., 1945	D.F.C.
2437	Fg. Off.	B.B.K. Rao	Oct., 1945	D.F.C.
2359	Fg. Off.	S.K. Mukerjee	Oct., 1945	D.F.C.
1567	Sqn. Ldr.	P.C. Lal	Oct., 1945	D.F.C.
1637	Fg. Off.	D.G. Bhore	Jun., 1943	M.B.E.
1963	Fg. Off.	Harjinder Singh	Jun., 1943	M.B.E.
1905	Flt. Lt.	Rawel Singh	Jun., 1944	M.B.E.
1967	Sqn. Ldr.	Safdar Kureshi	Jan., 1945	M.B.E.

Serial No.	Rank at time of award	Name	Date of Award	Deco- ration
2180	Fg. Off.	Ram Singh	Jan., 1945	M.B.E.
1560	Wg. Cdr.	S.N. Goyal	Jan., 1946	M.B.E.
2063	Flt. Lt.	S.P. Mehta	Jan., 1946	M.B.E.
1591	Sqn. Ldr.	H. Shamsi	Jan., 1946	M.B.E.
2758	Sqn. Ldr.	S.N. Chakerborty	Jun., 1946	M.B.E.
2395	Sqn. Ldr.	M.J. Kripalani	Jun., 1946	M.B.E.
1698	Sqn. Ldr.	Said-Ud-Din	Jun., 1946	M.B.E.
2012	Flt. Lt.	R.N. Sharma	Jun., 1946	M.B.E.
2249	Fg. Off.	Ram Singh	Jun., 1946	M.B.E.
1551	Wg. Cdr.	S. Mukerjee	Jun., 1945	O.B.E.
1665	Wg. Cdr.	M.M. Srinagesh	Jan., 1946	O.B.E.
1559	Air Cdre.	Mehar Singh	Mar., 1944	D.S.O.
1669	Flt. Lt.	D.F. Eduljee	Jun., 1944	A.F.C.
1962	Flt. Lt.	H.D. Bharucha	Sep., 1945	A.F.C.
10379	Sgt.	B.M. Kothari	Jan., 1945	B.E.M.
3234	Art. I.	P.B. Panth	Jan., 1945	B.E.M.
14825	Lac.	S. Purkayastha	Apr., 1945	B.E.M.
16228	A.C.I.	L.J. Saldhana	Jul., 1945	B.E.M.

Appendix "G"

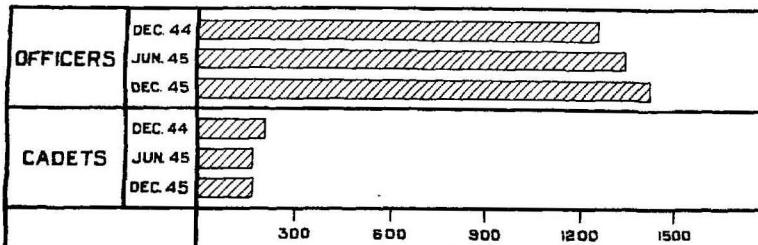
AIR FORCE COMMANDERS

<i>S.No.</i>	<i>Rank.</i>	<i>Name.</i>	<i>Date.</i>
1	Air Marshal	Sir John M. Steel	February 1931 — March 1935
2	-do-	Sir Edgar L. Ludlow Hewitt.	March 1935 — September 1937
3	-do-	Sir Philip B. Joubert de la Ferte	September 1937 — October 1939
4	-do-	Sir John F.A. Higgins	October 1939 — September 1940
5	Air Vice Marshal	Sir Patrick H.L. Playfair	September 1940 — March 1942
6	Air Chief Marshal (then Air Marshal)	Sir Richard E.C. Peirse	March 1942 — April 1943
7	Air Marshal	Sir Guy A.R. Garrow	April 1943 — March 1944
8	Air Vice Marshal	M. Thomas	March 1944 — January 1946

I. A. F. STATISTICS
 DURING THE 12 MONTHS JAN.- DEC. 1945.

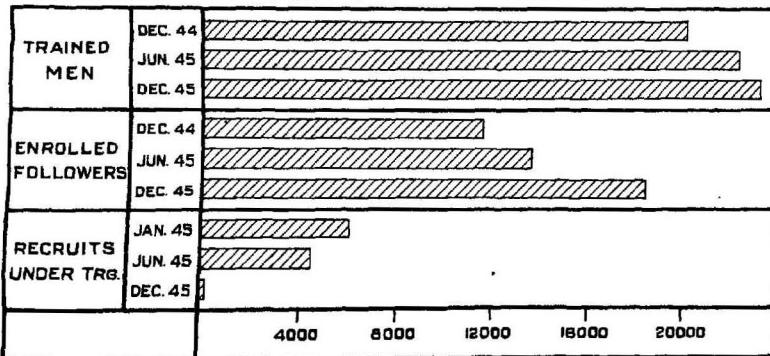
STRENGTH

OFFICERS AND CADETS



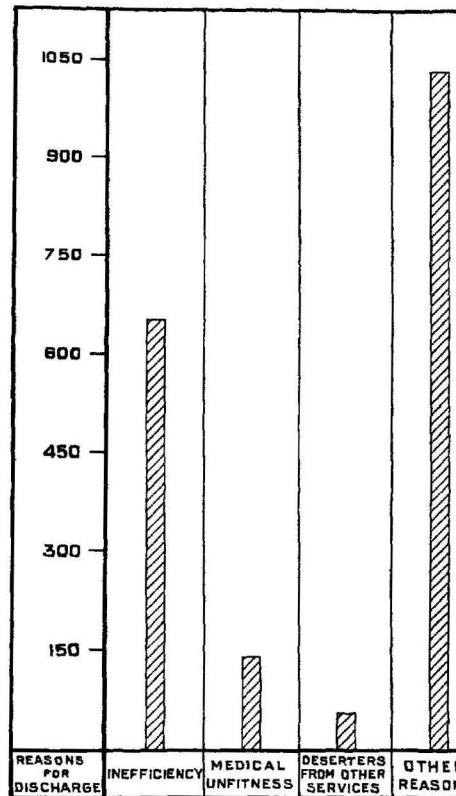
NOTE:-
 (1) NUMBER COMMISSIONED DURING PERIOD 1-1-45 TO 31-12-45 229
 (2) CASUALTIES JAN. TO DEC. 45 43
 (3) RELINQUISHMENTS OF COMMISSIONS JAN. TO DEC. 45 33
 (4) RELEASE: CLASS A NIL
 " CLASS B 17

TRAINED MEN, ENROLLED FOLLOWERS & RECRUITS UNDER TRAINING

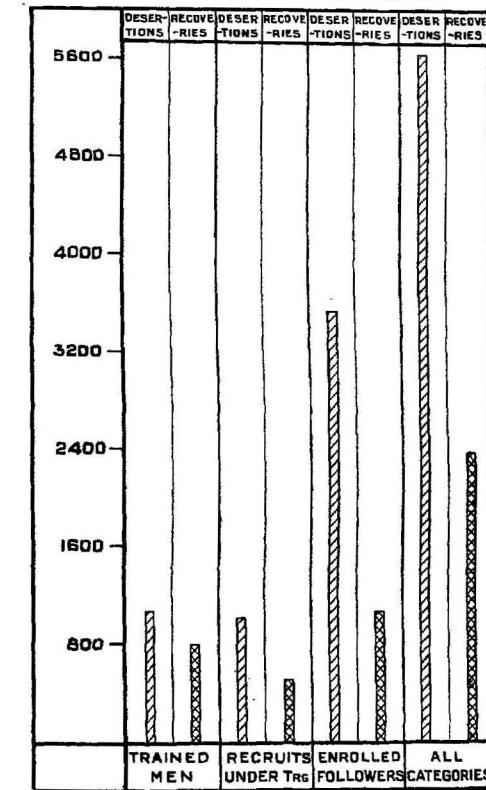


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